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**The political ecology of Ecuadorian environmentalism  
Buen vivir, nature and territory**

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# **The political ecology of Ecuadorian environmentalism: *buen vivir*, nature and territory**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the notions of *buen vivir*, the rights of nature (*pachamama*) and territory in Ecuadorian environmentalism, a country where the institutionalisation of the terms appeared as a political opportunity to construct a decolonial future that is based precisely in a reconfiguration of the nature/human relationship that might include the communitarian form of life depicted by the collective territory. To which extent those newly ideas help or hinder to construct alternatives to green capitalism is the key interest of this research.

The theoretical framework combines the ample field of political ecology with critical geography. The empirical research included in-depth interviews, documentary revision and participant observation at three research foci: state-related environmental activity, non-governmental environmental action and local community-based ecologism – that, in aggregate, comprise Ecuadorian environmentalism. The three empirical chapters of this thesis address each one of those research foci (Chapters 5-7). Chapter 5 tackles the *Programa Socio Bosque*, a governmental program of payment for conservation that contributes to transform *buen vivir* and the rights of nature into a renewed sustainable development. For that, the program maintains the human/nature divide and contributes to the territorial ordering that allows the production of nature for the capitalist market. Chapter 6 analyses extensively the diverse actors of non-governmental environmental organizations, revealing that for mainstream environmentalists, *buen vivir* and the rights of nature are a version of sustainable development, while critical ecologists fail to formulate a political alternative, as there is a dominance of the anti-extractivist discourse and a tendency towards essentialism of the indigenous world. However, indigenous comprehensions of socionatures and territory contained in the proposals for forest conservation of some indigenous organizations propound an alternative to state-led green capitalism. Chapter 7 discusses place-based environmentalism of the indigenous Tola Chica community. A close look to the vital experience of the community revealed how *buen vivir* and *pachamama* are connected to territory. The collective production of territory and nature is then highlighted in order to frame a more creative response to green capitalism.

The final chapter will conclude the main findings of this PhD and set possible lines of future investigation on the topic. In doing that, the research aims to contribute to a Latin American political ecology that draws upon decolonial studies, via an in-depth case study and social movements' experience.

## Table Of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	9
Glossary .....	10
Acronyms .....	11
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>13</b>
1.1 Ecuadorian environmentalism .....	13
1.2 <i>Buen vivir</i> , nature and territory .....	16
1.3 Research questions.....	19
1.4 Thesis structure .....	20
<b>Chapter 2 Theoretical framework .....</b>	<b>23</b>
2.1 Political ecology and the Latin American perspective.....	23
2.2 Environmentalism.....	32
2.3 Sustainable development and green capitalism.....	36
2.4 Nature .....	42
2.5 Territory .....	48
2.6 Summary .....	55
<b>Chapter 3 Methodology .....</b>	<b>57</b>
3.1 Qualitative methodology: positionality, reliability, validity, ethics .....	57
3.2 Research approaches: ethnography and case study .....	62
3.2.1 Ethnographic approach .....	63
3.2.2 Case study approach .....	65
3.3 Research design .....	66
3.3.1 Case study construction and rationale .....	69
3.3.2 The state-led Programa Socio Bosque .....	73
3.3.3 Non-governmental environmentalism .....	74
3.3.4 Tola Chica community.....	75
3.4 Methods .....	77
3.4.1 Interviewing.....	77
3.4.2 Participant observation .....	82
3.4.3 Documents.....	84
3.4.4 Audio-visual materials.....	86
3.4.5 Cartography .....	86

3.4.6	Analysing the Data.....	87
<b>3.5</b>	<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>Research context.....</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Ecuador, nature and environmental degradation.....</b>	<b>89</b>
4.1.1	A brief history of environmental degradation in Ecuador .....	92
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Ecuadorian environmentalism .....</b>	<b>96</b>
4.2.1	The greening of the State.....	96
4.2.2	The greening of Ecuadorian society.....	98
<b>4.3</b>	<b>Indigenous communities and environmentalism .....</b>	<b>104</b>
4.3.1	Ecuadorian indigenous movement.....	104
4.3.2	Tola Chica community.....	107
<b>4.4</b>	<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>The state's environmentalism .....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>The <i>Programa Socio Bosque</i>.....</b>	<b>111</b>
5.1.1	Origins and main achievements of the PSB.....	112
5.1.2	Framing the PSB: The PNBV and the Constitution.....	115
<b>5.2</b>	<b>The state's environmentalism .....</b>	<b>117</b>
5.2.1	<i>Buen vivir</i> as sustainable development.....	118
5.2.2	The rights of nature as scientific administration of nature.....	121
5.2.3	Technocratic environmentalism in operation.....	125
<b>5.3</b>	<b>The state's production of nature.....</b>	<b>135</b>
5.3.1	Fractured nature.....	135
5.3.2	Commoditized nature .....	139
<b>5.4</b>	<b>The state's production of territory .....</b>	<b>144</b>
5.4.1	Regularising the rural world .....	146
5.4.2	Producing territory.....	150
<b>5.5</b>	<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>The Ecuadorian non-state environmentalism.....</b>	<b>157</b>
<b>6.1</b>	<b>A politicised environment: diverse environmentalisms .....</b>	<b>157</b>
6.1.1	Diversity in non-governmental organizations .....	157
6.1.2	<i>Buen vivir</i> and the rights of nature: their way into the Constitution .....	164
6.1.3	Mainstream environmentalism in action.....	168
6.1.4	Critical ecologism: post-extractivism and the critique to green capitalism ..	170
<b>6.2</b>	<b>Producing nature .....</b>	<b>175</b>
6.2.1	Subjecting nature .....	175
6.2.2	<i>Pachamama</i> in critical ecologists and indigenous environmental politics ...	178

<b>6.3 Producing territory .....</b>	<b>184</b>
6.3.1 Critique of the PSB to configure territory production .....	184
6.3.2 Community conservation: producing the indigenous territories .....	186
<b>6.4 Summary .....</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>Chapter 7 Tola Chica indigenous community: the social production of nature and territory .....</b>	<b>191</b>
<b>7.1 Tola Chica community .....</b>	<b>191</b>
7.1.1 Land conflicts, fractured territoriality and political affiliations .....	192
<b>7.2 Tola Chica's ecologism .....</b>	<b>199</b>
<b>7.3 Producing nature .....</b>	<b>204</b>
7.3.1 <i>Pachamama</i> : universal, external or socionature? .....	204
7.3.2 Socio-natures and the agricultural link .....	208
<b>7.4 Tola Chica's territory production .....</b>	<b>211</b>
7.4.1 Tola Chica territorial planning .....	211
7.4.2 Communitarian territory production .....	225
<b>7.5 Summary .....</b>	<b>233</b>
<b>Chapter 8 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>235</b>
<b>8.1 Key findings and main contributions .....</b>	<b>236</b>
8.1.1 <i>Buen vivir</i> , nature and territory among Ecuadorian environmentalists .....	236
8.1.2 Challenging green capitalism: confronting sustainable development, and capitalist understanding of nature and territory .....	241
8.1.3 Alternative politics of environmental action .....	245
<b>8.2 Contributing to a future research agenda .....</b>	<b>248</b>
 Appendix A. Interview guide questions .....	 253
Appendix B. List of interviewees .....	256
Bibliography .....	258

## List of Figures

Figure 4.1 Map deforestation and vegetation cover of continental Ecuador. ....	91
Figure 5.1 Contribution of different categories of protection to the increment of the percentage of area under formal conservation or environmental management between 2008 and 2012. ....	115
Figure 5.2 Map of Ecuador with oil and mining concessions, and properties enrolled in the PSB as at 2012. ....	152
Figure 5.3 Amount of incentives delivered by province in 2012 (in US \$). Amazon provinces noted in red. ....	153
Figure 7.1 Tola Chica's territory (red) in the Ilaló Hill (green) and the suburban boroughs where its population lives (pink). Prepared with the assistance of the Collective of Critical Geography of Ecuador, 2016.....	195
Figure 7.2 Tola Chica's territory as it appears in the 1997 Warrant of Adjudication (the colours and labels were added afterwards by the community's nurseryman).....	212
Figure 7.3 Tola Chica's territorial zoning. ....	215

## List of Photos

Photo 7.1 Quito (background) and Tumbaco (foreground), as seen from Tola Chica.	195
Photo 7.2 Parade during the Festival of the Sun ( <i>Inty Raymi</i> ) in 2012. ....	198
Photo 7.3 Community women obtaining seeds from different types of maizes.....	201
Photo 7.4 The plant nursery. In the background is where the community's Assemblies are held once a month.....	202
Photo 7.5 Partial view of the area where the edible forest was planted in early 2014. The sign states: "Project Edible Forest - Tola Chica Community" .....	210
Photo 7.6 Communal eco-house.....	216
Photo 7.7 Nurseryman (on the right) and a visitor (on the left) next to a tank for harvesting and cleaning rainwater for human use.....	216



## List of Tables

Table 5.1 Goals of Objective 7: Guaranteeing the rights of nature and promoting environmental sustainability .....	124
Table 5.2 Number of properties and area monitored .....	133
Table 5.3 PSB geographic prioritisation index .....	137
Table 5.4. Structure of the PSB incentive .....	140
Table 5.5 Percentage of incentive's restitution required for the cancellation of the Conservation Agreement.....	148
Table 5.6 Forbidden activities, liabilities and reasons for cancellation/temporary suspension of a Conservation Agreement with the PSB.....	149
Table 7.1 Communal and individual plots in Tola Chica's territory.....	217
Table 7.2 Tola Chica's Territorial Management Plans .....	218

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## **Glossary**

**Cacique:** Local political authority.

**Cambia-mano o maki mañachi:** Literally 'exchange of hands' which means giving an hour of labour in exchange for an hour of labour.

**Chakra:** Agricultural land, usually located next to the household.

**Comunero o comunera:** Members of the community.

**Guambra:** Kid or young person.

**Hacienda system:** System of indigenous exploitation that Ecuador inherited from Spanish colonial times.

**Huasipungo:** Small parcel of land given to indigenous people to sustain their families in exchange of the labour they were forced to do up to six days per week in the large haciendas for no salary.

**Inty Raymi:** Festival of the Sun, celebrated every year between June and July.

**Kolla Raymi:** Festival of the Moon, celebrated every year in October.

**Mestizo:** Person of mixed race.

**Minga:** Type of collective work that has a collective benefit.

**Montubio:** The ethnic identification of the native people from the Costa.

**Obraje:** Textile factory based on indebted and otherwise tied indigenous labour.

**Paramo:** Highland Andean ecosystem, usually located between 3,000 and 5,000 meters above sea level.

**Randy randy:** System of reciprocity.

## Acronyms

ANA	Asamblea Nacional Ambiental, National Environmental Assembly.
ANC	Asamblea Nacional Constituyente, National Constituent Assembly
BINGO	Big International non-governmental organization.
CEA	Coordinadora Ecuatoriana de Agroecología, Ecuadorian Coordinator of Agroecology
CEDENMA	Comité Ecuatoriano de Organizaciones en Defensa de la Naturaleza y el Medio Ambiente, Ecuadorian Committee of Organizations for the Defence of Nature and the Environment.
CODENPE	Consejo para el Desarrollo de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos del Ecuador, Council for the Development the Nationalities and Peoples of Ecuador.
CONAIE	Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador, Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador.
CONFENIAE	Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas de la Amazonía Ecuatoriana, Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon.
EA	Ecological Action NGO
ECUARUNARI	Confederación de Pueblos de la Nacionalidad Kichwa del Ecuador, Confederation of Peoples of the Kichwa Nationality of Ecuador.
FEI	Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios, Ecuadorian Indian Federation.
FEINE	Federación Ecuatoriana de Indígenas Evangélicos, Ecuadorian Federation of Evangelical Indigenous People.
FENOCIN	Federación Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas e Indígenas, National Federation of Peasant, Indigenous and Black People Organisations.
INDA	Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Agrario, National Institute of Agrarian Development.
INEC	Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos. National Institute of Census and Statistics.
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature.
LAPE	Latin American Political Ecology.
MA	Ministerial Agreement.
NGO	Non-governmental organization

PANE	Patrimonio de Áreas Naturales del Ecuador, National Patrimony of Protected Areas
PF	Pachamama Foundation NGO
PNBV	Plan Nacional del Buen Vivir, National Plan of Good Living.
REDD+	United Nations Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries.
RGS	Red de Guardianes de Semillas, Network of Seeds Guardians.
SENPLADES	Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo, National Secretariat of Planning and Development.
SOM	Synthesised Operative Manual of the <i>Programa Socio Bosque</i>
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

## Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis examines how key actors who are involved in Ecuadorian environmentalism understand and use the notions of *buen vivir* (translated into English as 'good living'), the rights of nature or *pachamama* ('Mother Earth') and territory in shaping their ideas of and strategies about nature conservation. It simultaneously considers whether, and in what ways, the deployment of these ideas may help to inform an intellectual and practical alternative to a state-led green capitalism currently being elaborated in this country. The investigation is theoretically framed in relation to scholarship in the fields of political ecology and critical geography with an eye to critical work on mainstream thinking surrounding sustainable development and green capitalism, as well as studies that assess more broadly human-nature relationships and conceptualisations of territory. The empirical aspect to this PhD thesis, meanwhile, is conducted in relation to three research foci – state-related environmental activity, non-governmental environmental action and local community-based ecologism – that, in aggregate, comprise Ecuadorian environmentalism.

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the main topics of the thesis. It does so by first providing an initial description of Ecuadorian environmentalism and its recent engagement with green capitalism on the one side and with indigenous epistemologies on the other, in order to frame the Ecuadorian case at the centre of this PhD. Then, it introduces the notions of *buen vivir*, nature, as seen to be linked to the idea of 'rights of nature' or *pachamama* in the Ecuadorian context, and territory, which is in turn connected to the notion of the 'plurinational state'. Finally, the chapter establishes the research questions and structure of the study.

### 1.1 Ecuadorian environmentalism

Similar to other countries, environmental consciousness developed in Ecuador in the decades from 1970-90. In those years the country got involved in international environmental discourse; environmental NGO (Non-Governmental Organizations) were founded, and the state consolidated a structure to oversee environmental issues linked to the international governance structure set up in place (Latorre-Tomás 2009, Muñoz and Hidalgo 2011). The state and society's accepted views of environmental issues also changed. For example, before 1970s the state considered the environmental topic in relation to public health (i.e. pollution) and the use of natural resources from a utilitarian point of view (Varea and Barrera 1997, Cuvi 2005). But after that decade the state's interest in regulating the exploitation of natural resources, which dominated public policy and legislation, encountered early notions of nature conservation that started to circulate in the country (Echeverría 2011).

New ideas arrived with the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. State-linked environmental agencies and NGOs flourished, aligned to ideas about nature conservation, sustainable development and environmental management (Echeverría 2011). From the outset, a lack of state funding, and hence dependency on the international cooperation system, was a common challenge for state-run environmental agencies. This in part explains the government's concentrated effort to develop financial mechanisms such as the National Environmental Fund, set in 1998 to finance the National System of Protected Areas (Muñoz 2011). Nature conservation mechanisms such as the Fund were the preamble to green capitalist mechanisms development, like the one which was implemented in the country in 2008 and which is a particular focus of this PhD: the *Programa Socio Bosque* (PSB, Forest Partner Programme). But the PSB is not the only green capitalist strategy: the country has developed its National Strategy for REDD+, various schemes of payment for environmental services operating at the local level, and a myriad of mechanisms concerned with mitigating climate change (Ministry of Environment 2013b).

The NGO sector, in turn, is less homogenous in its reading of the environmental issue. On the one side, there are NGOs with a techno-centric approach to the environmental issue, focusing on environmental policy-making and working together with the state and international mainstream environmental agencies. On the other side, there are a number of NGOs that are chiefly concerned with environmental justice following the exposure of environmental pollution and human rights abuses as a result of capitalist development. These NGOs appear also unconvinced by the prevailing sustainable development narrative (Varea and Barrera 1997). The differences amongst Ecuadorian environmental organizations – early labelled as mainstream environmentalists and critical ecologists (Fontaine 2007, Bebbington and Humphreys-Bebbington 2009, Latorre-Tomás 2009) - persist until today and will be explored in great depth in this PhD. However, by highlighting problems with the sustainable development narrative, the NGOs which are critical of green capitalism mechanisms such as the PSB and REDD+, have exercised considerable influence on how the indigenous organizations perceive them (see more on this in Chapter 5 and 6).

Indeed, as important political actors in Ecuador, environmentalists and critical ecologists have worked together with national and regional indigenous organizations. Moreover, for some authors, the recognition of the rights of nature (*pachamama*), and the inclusion of *buen vivir* as a key organising principle of the state in the 2008 Constitution, is an outcome of the convergence in the aims and interests of the environmental NGO and national indigenous organisations (Acosta and Martínez 2009,

2011, Sánchez-Parga 2011, Gudynas 2016). The various meanings and implications of both terms for environmental politics are hence of much importance. It is true, as this PhD will explore, that the precise meaning and application of this understanding to real-world situations had not yet been settled. Thus, as we shall see, indigenous and environmental organizations, as well as 'progressive' governments'<sup>1</sup> widely used the notions while disputing their meaning (Gudynas 2013, 2016, Viola Recasens 2014). Still, for environmentalists supporting local struggles, these ideas represented real alternatives to the status quo. Furthermore, they amounted to new ways of valuing nature and social wellbeing that were substantiated both by the experience of local and/or indigenous communities and an emerging body of critical scholarship (Acosta and Martínez 2009, Escobar 2010, Gudynas 2011, Harris 2016). This could certainly be seen in Ecuador where the discourses of critical ecologists and indigenous organisations converged in a context where the 'progressive' government had nonetheless clearly opted for a conventional development model based on extractive capitalism (Sacher and Báez 2014, Merino 2016, Silveira *et al.* 2017). This convergence of thinking was reinforced by the perceived need to defend nature or *pachamama*, often seen to be concentrated in indigenous territories, against extractivism and other forms of commodification (as this thesis will highlight; see also work discussing the Yasuni-ITT initiative in Ecuador<sup>2</sup>).

The debate involving both notions was at its highest between 2009 and 2012 among governmental officers, scholars, indigenous intellectuals and political activists. The debate is still going on (see Chapter 4; for the newest debates see: Gudynas 2016, Hope 2016, Gallardo 2017, Kauffman and Martin 2017, Humphreys 2017, Ramírez-Cendrero 2017). The discussions revolved about how far these terms fit within post-colonial, post-neoliberal, post-extractive and post-human narratives, while what is clear from this large literature is that the conception behind is grounded "in rationalities, ways of interpreting the world and living practices of various Latin American rural communities" (Giraldo 2014: 102). It is the aim of this PhD to contribute to this discussion within political ecology, thus the next section introduces both ideas and how they intersect with the concept of territory. A more in-depth account of the principal elements of the debate about *buen vivir*, the rights of nature or *pachamama*, and territory is provided in Chapter 4.

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<sup>1</sup> Latin American 'progressive' governments were the outcome of electoral victories of the Left – that is, in Venezuela, Brazil, Bolivia, and Ecuador (Beasley-Murray *et al.* 2009), as well as in Argentina before 2015.

<sup>2</sup> The Yasuni-ITT Initiative was a national programme implemented so as to avoid oil extraction from a portion of Yasuni National Park (the ITT block) in the Amazon, in exchange for monetary compensation from the international community (Arsel and Avila Ángel 2012).



## 1.2 *Buen vivir*, nature and territory

This PhD is notably a study in how key ideas about socio-natural interaction affect multi-actor environmentalism as different players interpret them in divergent and perhaps novel ways. As a critical investigation, this thesis has understandably turned to comparable critical studies of environment and development that have been central to the research field of political ecology since at least the 1980s (Peet *et al.* 2011, Robbins 2012). In considering the global South in particular, political ecology has highlighted the historical evolution of unequal political, ecological and economic relationships spanning the North and the South, giving an intrinsically geopolitical and historical character to environmental problems (Bryant and Bailey 1997, Zimmerer and Bassett 2003). In Latin America, this has led to a focus on socio-environmental conflicts that are a product of post-colonial relations and thus of a hegemonic development model that has at its core the extraction of raw materials (Martínez-Alier 2002, Escobar 2007, Alimonda 2015). In describing these conflicts, a flourishing Latin American political ecology assesses how specific power relationships arise, while exploring the structures that support capitalism and promote social exclusion; all of this forms part of a wider consideration of different rationalities and knowledge systems (Leff 2015) that hinder or help social struggles promoting a ‘decolonial horizon’ (Mignolo 2007, Machado 2012) and post-capitalist future (Alimonda 2011) for this long blighted region.

Debate here has increasingly revolved around benchmark indigenous terms such as *buen vivir/sumak kawsay* and *buena vida/suma qamaña* that acquired transnational attention after they were incorporated in the Ecuadorian and Bolivian Constitutions of 2008 and 2009 respectively<sup>3</sup>. In parallel to these seemingly novel appreciations of development, both countries have also fiercely debated how to understand nature (or *pachamama*) as a *subject* of rights. These have also received wide coverage as innovative attempts to get to grips with a more just and sustainable outlook on human relations with nature; here, too, the thinking was manifested in the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution and Bolivian moves to write a Law for the Rights of Mother Earth (Gudynas 2015, Gallardo 2017, Humphreys 2017).

In Ecuador, the terms *buen vivir/sumak kawsay* and the rights of nature or *pachamama* were intertwined from the beginning, as will be illustrated in this PhD. Soon, ideas

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<sup>3</sup> I use *sumak kawsay* (in Kichwa language) and *buen vivir* (in Spanish) in this thesis, as they are the terms commonly used in Ecuador. The translation of *sumak kawsay* into *buen vivir* is polemic. However, I will use this translation along the dissertation as it is widespread and is already well established in the political discourses.

about territory and indigenous territoriality entered into the picture in the context of environmental struggles, which were the result of growing confrontation with the regime of Rafael Correa and its political preference to deepen capitalism on the basis of natural resource extraction (Sacher and Báez 2014). And yet, it is precisely in the indigenous territories where the modernizing project of the state and its associated extractivist agenda is concentrated. It is no wonder, therefore, that multitudinous conflicts across the country assume a central place for territory in strategic action and struggle (Silveira *et al.* 2017). To add more complexity to the scenario, it is important to note that in Ecuador ‘territory’ is regularly seen as being an integral part of a ‘plurinational state’ rendered tangible via the assertion of ancestral indigenous territoriality (SENPLADES 2010, Farrah and Vasapollo 2011).

At first, the concepts were depicted as the result of years of struggle led by the indigenous movements and their supporters in Ecuador and Bolivia. Most commentators postulated the notions as being rooted in the Andean-Amazon indigenous cosmovision, expressed as *sumak kawsay* and *pachamama* in the Kichwa language (Gudynas 2011, Radcliffe 2012, Hope 2017). The specific articulation of social and natural thinking with indigenous worldviews caught on, even seen nature to be a subject deserving of constitutional rights in the Ecuadorian case. Indeed, this step was heralded as a landmark political success of the environmental movement insofar as this conceptual constitutional innovation was seen to promote a new understanding of the relationship between humans and nature (Acosta and Martínez 2011, Gudynas 2009).

Both notions are thus presented as part of a post- or decolonial agenda in the region, one that according to some authors, is “yet to be constructed” as long as it is contingent on particular territories (Gudynas and Acosta 2011). This unwillingness to define a-priori an alternative political system remains the most complex aspect of *sumak kawsay/buen vivir* (Sánchez-Parga 2011, Gallardo 2017), one that this PhD aims to address in the context of environmental politics (see Research Question 3 in section 1.3).

Nevertheless, this term is certainly linked with ‘territory’, as *buen vivir* is seen to be constructed in direct reference to territorial particularities (Altmann 2013a). Hence, the territory, which is central in indigenous politics in Ecuador, appears pivotal for the *buen vivir* narrative. In Ecuador, the ancestral indigenous territory<sup>4</sup> implies local control of the

---

<sup>4</sup> The ancestral territory is where strong spiritual bonds connect people to the land and which come to define a people’s sense of identity (see Sarayaku 2011).

means of production combined with systems of self-governance, forming the basis of a plurinational state (CONAIE 2007, see also Simbaña 2011). Hence, the 2008 Constitution also reaffirmed the plurinational character of the Ecuadorian state already recognized in the 1998 Constitution (Republic of Ecuador 1998, Preamble) and establishes that “legally sanctioned territories” of the *montubio*<sup>5</sup>, Afro-Ecuadorian and indigenous peoples are the collectively-owned spaces where those peoples can produce and reproduce their material and symbolic lives (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Art. 57, Sections 4, 5 and 9).

Certainly, and as advocated by the Ecuadorian indigenous movement, plurinationality promotes a new state model in which ethnic diversity simultaneously denotes different forms of political, social and economic organization (CONAIE 2007). The Andean-Amazon indigenous nationalities and peoples hence are entitled to exercise self-determination and sovereignty over their territories (Altmann 2013a). In fact, indigenous leaders declare clearly that the difference between their vision and that embedded in Northern ‘multiculturalism’ is that plurinationality confers sub-national territorial rights (Sacher and Báez 2014), including the respect for specific modes of production and socio-cultural manifestations “born and developed in a territory historically linked to the people” (Altmann 2013a: 61). Hence, for some writers, plurinationality and its associated sense of territoriality embodies a potent de facto challenge to relations of capitalist production (Simbaña 2011).

The rights of nature or *pachamama*, in turn, were presented as a ‘biocentric turn’ in politics (Gudynas 2009): a decolonial expression of nature (Machado 2010) which is no longer an object of exploitation by capitalist modernity, but a *subject* of rights. In conferring rights to nature, say the enactors of this idea, humans and nature are re-unified – an abiding aspiration of some types of environmentalism (see Chapter 2). Still, few analyses have been conducted on how the notion contributes to the analogy of nature as Mother Earth even though the Kichwa word *pachamama* is understood as a feminine and deified figure (Simbaña 2011, Giraldo 2012) more akin to deep ecology and ecocentric views than to indigenous epistemologies (Viola Recasens 2014). In general, the very concept of nature is scarcely debated or even challenged among scholars, environmentalists or critical ecologists interested in environmentalism issues in the region. Hence this PhD aims to fill that gap.

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<sup>5</sup> *Montubio* is the ethnic identification of the native people from the Costa, the geographic region between the Pacific ocean and the Andean cordillera.

In sum, critical ecologists have built discourses and strategies around these three terms aiming to confront extractivism, and also to challenge new 'green' capitalist ventures, such as the *Programa Socio Bosque*, increasingly coming to the fore in Ecuador. Such conceptual articulation also features as a key element of the Ecuadorian environmentalism that is the focus of this PhD, even as the synergies (or not) with ideas coming out of indigenous organizations and communities are assessed. Indeed, how critical ecologists and indigenous knowledge go together to confront green capitalism in the country is a recurrent theme in this thesis.

### 1.3 Research questions

A central objective of this PhD is to understand how far and in what ways ideas about *buen vivir*, nature and territory help or hinder in the construction of alternatives to green capitalism (increasingly seen as becoming a new form of capitalist accumulation and a new regime framing human-nature relationships). Perhaps more than any other country, these notions are firmly entrenched in the Ecuadorian political arena with both *buen vivir* and the rights of nature (*pachamama*) included in the 2008 Constitution with associated connections to ideas about territory (via 'plurinationality' thinking). Through this investigation, I hope to contribute to a Latin American political ecology, via an in-depth case study of a key political-ecological national 'moment' in that region.

To this end, the thesis is framed around three research questions. The first one investigates how far and in what ways do the ideas about *buen vivir*, nature and territory (either as individual notions or in combination) interact with the diverse types of Ecuadorian environmentalism? How do the various key actors of Ecuadorian environmentalism understand and deploy *buen vivir*, nature and territory in their work? How important are these notions to their political practice? Do these ideas actually help the environmentalists to advance wider agendas? This line of inquiry is pursued in relation to three research foci: state-linked environmental activity, non-governmental organization (NGO) actions, and local community-based ecologism. In the process, I will remain alert to the possibilities of how these different (if overlapping) centres of Ecuadorian environmentalism relate to the question of green capitalism. Do they end up blocking this latest international economic intervention or might they even paradoxically be facilitating it?

Indeed, the second research question is precisely concerned with the potential contradictions at play here insofar as it assesses how far the underlying rationality or ethos reflected in these notions is even capable of challenging internationally-hegemonic practices based on seemingly 'compelling' narratives of green capitalism.

Do these ideas represent a genuine critique of a status quo profoundly shaped by linear understandings of sustainable development (including nowadays green capitalism), the modern human-nature dichotomy, and visions of fixed territories? Or, are they but the latest in a long line of purportedly alternative notions about human-nature existence that are simply co-opted by a much more powerful political and economic order?

Finally, the third research question builds on the other two inasmuch as it seeks to understand whether any of these three notions might form the basis for a coherent political strategy to oppose green capitalism. To fully investigate this particular area of interest, the PhD undertakes an empirical study of an indigenous community (Tola Chica, not far from the city of Quito) as it is framed by wider indigenous environmental action. The aim is to assess to what extent and in what ways these three ideas might guide specific local practices within a given territory that simultaneously amount to a broader challenge to the pursuit of green capitalism in the country. Does local community-based ecologism embody many of the ideals and thinking of an alternative way of doing things? And, if so, how far can such action avoid the usual trap of local scalar action – that is, prone to uncritical mystification on the one hand, and liable to limited wider (or scaled up) political and ecological impacts on the other?

## **1.4 Thesis structure**

The thesis is structured in keeping with these three research questions and as they are pursued across three research foci. To start with, the theoretical framework is presented in Chapter 2 in order to situate this study in the context of selected scholarly literature produced both within and beyond Latin America. The chapter first introduces political ecology as a critical international field of study concerned with understanding how diverse actors operate in a politicised environment, then moves on to discuss Latin American political ecology. The second section addresses environmentalism as a form in which humans understand and aim to relate to nature, describing the different forms of categorization found in political ecology literature. The chapter thereafter explores some of the critical studies on sustainable development with greater emphasis on green capitalism and neoliberal environmentalism emerging out of political ecology and critical geography in recent years. This analysis provides a sound basis for assessing the wider economic dynamics that any conceptual and practical challenge to the status quo in Ecuador must confront. The chapter moves on to an appraisal of scholarly literature on nature, a central object of study. An in-depth discussion about the concept of nature in critical geography and political ecology is conducted in order to frame the

analysis of the rights of nature or *pachamama*. Finally, territory as a key concept in human geography is examined both connected to the state and to civil society inasmuch as it has considerable significance for social organization and the struggle against green capitalism – a core area of interest of this PhD.

Chapter 3 then describes the qualitative methodology used in this thesis. Specifically, this involved a combination of ethnography and a case study approaches. Here, both the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen methodology are canvassed, followed by a consideration of questions of ethics, validity, reliability and positionality in the research. Research design, the specific methods used and data analysis are reviewed, while difficulties encountered during the year of fieldwork in Ecuador (and how they were addressed) are explored.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the research context. It sketches an historical political ecology of the conditions that led to the emergence of environmental concerns in Ecuador (including ideas about *buen vivir*, and the rights of nature or *pachamama*). In the process, the chapter shows how Ecuadorian environmentalism developed in an inter-connected manner across the three research foci of this PhD: state-linked environmental activity, NGO environmental action, and local community-based ecologism often reflective of indigenous practices. It ends by introducing the specific study site for investigating the latter – namely, Tola Chica community.

The three major empirical chapters that follow (Chapters 5-7) are organized according to the three-fold research foci set out above (i.e. state-linked activity, NGO action and community-based practices). Thus, Chapter 5 is concerned with analysing how ideas about *buen vivir*, the rights of nature or *pachamama* and territory are appropriated and deployed by the state. To do so, it zeroes in on a key conservation program – the *Programa Socio Bosque* (PSB or ‘Forest Partner Programme’) - to assess how far the environmentalism of the state affects the advancement of green capitalist ventures in the country.

Chapter 6 in turn examines how different understandings of *buen vivir*, the rights of nature or *pachamama* and territory inform NGO environmental action and thinking in contemporary Ecuador. This investigation entails discussing the multifaceted ways that NGOs engage with the issue of fossil fuel dependant capitalism and the green transition on the one side, and how they interact with indigenous knowledge and worldviews on the other. Here, detailed analysis in particular of critical ecologism assesses how coherent the political strategy is in opposing green capitalism, before attention is turned to an initial exploration of indigenous thinking notably about territory.

Chapter 7 then complements that latter discussion of indigenous thinking by providing an in-depth examination of local community-based ecologism. Hence, and via consideration of political-ecological dynamics in Tola Chica community, the chapter is able to explore the ways in which the notions featured in this PhD may be seen to intertwine in the context of a location-specific understanding of territory and community; whether this amounts to a fully-fledged alternative to state-led green capitalism is also assessed.

Chapter 8 finally summarizes the main findings of the PhD on Ecuadorian environmentalism, notably about how far and in what ways the notions of *buen vivir*, nature and territory inform actor thinking and practice across the three research foci, and with an eye to possible challenges to green capitalism. The PhD's overall contribution to knowledge is next canvassed, before the chapter ends by briefly considering a further research agenda.

## Chapter 2 Theoretical framework

The previous chapter introduced the main concerns of this PhD, notably in relation to ideas about *buen vivir*, the rights of nature or *pachamama* and territory. In turn, the current chapter presents the theoretical framework that guides this thesis, drawn mainly from research in political ecology as well as critical geography. As such, it first addresses selected work in political ecology generally before focusing on a growing literature in Latin American political ecology. The chapter then considers critical work on the role of mainstream environmentalism in supporting 'conventional' capitalism while helping to articulate a 'green' capitalism. Defined as a new regime of capital accumulation, 'green capitalism' is then explored from the political ecology perspective. Discussion thereafter turns to research on the contemporary approaches to nature, highlighting the social production of nature perspective among political ecologists and geographers in order to gauge how scholarship might connect it to a re-configuration of the human/nature relationship including an assessment of the notion of *pachamama* within those studies. The final section addresses the role of territory interconnected to the concept of state in socio-natural interaction as both a key concept in geography and one that has a great resonance (via the notion of plurinationality) in the Ecuadorian context.

### 2.1 Political ecology and the Latin American perspective

Political ecology notably developed from the 1970s as a critical framework for understanding human-nature interaction – or, more precisely, to “explain how and why humans are transforming nature” (Batterbury 2015: 27). By exploring the “political sources, conditions and ramifications of environmental change” (Bryant 1992: 13), political ecology seeks “to understand how networks of power, as mediated through a broadly-defined political economy, influence nature-society relations on the ground” (Turner 2014: 479). In this way, and by emphasizing the concept and practices of *power* – that is, its unequal distribution amongst groups - political ecology rejects technical explanations of the ecological crises (Zimmerer and Bassett 2003, Peet *et al.* 2011), thereby acknowledging that ecological and social processes interact in a dialectical manner (Robins 2012, Watts 2015).

Since the 1970s, political ecology has been especially prominent in Anglo-American scholarship (Robbins 2012), growing from the analysis of “rural and agrarian communities in the post-colonial world” (Watts 2015: 30). Early works combined a Marxist political economy perspective with environmental thinking to politicize the discussions about ecological change and human-nature interactions, suggesting that environmental problems are manifestations of economic and political interests related



to the expansion of capitalism and its effects on human beings and nature (Bryant and Bailey 1997, Osborne 2015, Watts 2015). According to Aletta Biersack and James B. Greenberg (2006), the first use of the term political ecology in Marxist studies was to signify “the study [of] how power relations mediate the human-environmental relations” and to respond to cultural ecology that highlighted the multifaceted forms in which different societies adapt to the environmental change, instead of focusing on the structural inequality of capitalism (Biersack and Greenberg 2006: 3, see also Forsyth 2003). Political ecology, too, sought to fill the void of ecological analysis in the Marxist tradition (Castree 2000).

Yet political ecology’s foundation as a separate discipline is commonly set on Piers Blaikie’s work (1985), which forged the link between environmental knowledge and political economy, globally. At a time when neo-Malthusian perspectives blamed a growing human population as the root cause of environmental problems (Bryant 1997), Blaikie’s original analysis and subsequent work (i.e. Blaikie and Brookfield 1987) advanced the idea that land (or environmental) degradation was both a consequence and cause of social marginalization and inequality, the outcome of capitalist relations of production (Bryant and Bailey 1997, Biersack and Greenberg 2006). It challenged, too, positivist explanations of environmental change that were common in mainstream environmental thinking at the time (Bryant 1997). According to Forsyth, Blaikie’s work concluded that a “strong political imperative and desire to correct social injustice” (Forsyth 2008: 756) were located at the starting point of the discipline, which gives political ecology the radical perspective it exhibits today (Robbins 2012).

From this structuralist Marxist departure point, that highlighted the material conditions of environmental change and class analysis, political ecology moved towards post-structuralist approaches in the 1990 decade (Bryant and Bailey 1997). This discipline’s turning point followed the theoretical turn in the social sciences with the advent of post-modernity and its criticism of the human/nature divide, the linear vision of history, and the failure to acknowledge diversity and difference (hence pretensions of universalism) of most social sciences (Harvey 1989, Jameson 1991). Marxism was particularly criticized as a “totalizing, grand-theoretical Eurocentric, teleological, progress-oriented framework” (Biersack and Greenberg 2006: 4). In political ecology, this transition focused on the *narratives* of ecological change<sup>6</sup> and strongly criticised the idea that

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<sup>6</sup> Forsyth defines narrative of ecological change as “convenient yet simplistic explanations of nature, causes and impacts of environmental problems” (2006: 758).

ecological science could measure ecological equilibrium or natural imbalance (Forsyth 2008); hence, challenging the political actions taken upon scientific knowledge. Those approaches rejected an a priori structural connection between capitalism and the environmental crises, arguing instead in favour of an understanding of the multiple dimensions and diverse appreciations of the ecological crises that also took into account local insights and knowledges. For Bryant (2000) the 'second wave' of political ecology explored "the social construction of environmental knowledge rather than the material struggles", for example "(re)assessing the portrayal of environmental 'problems'" (Bryant 2000: 674) and the social construction of nature (Blaikie 2008). Post-structural political ecology and discursive approaches focused on who produces reality and with what purpose; hence those strands devoted much attention to the discursive practices "through which objects are invested with meaning" (Biersack and Greenberg 2006: 14). Those studies "have clearly demonstrated how the discursive and symbolic framing of a situation produces material, socio-ecological relations" (Burke and Shear 2014: 130).

Indeed, political ecologists have adopted a discursive approach to assess issues of nature conservation (Bryant 2000), politics of nature (Escobar 1999), forestry and carbon exclusion (Asiyanbi 2016), ecosystem services (Kull *et al.* 2015), ecological crisis (Swyngedouw 2011, 2015), or green growth (Lee 2015). Still, Piers Blaikie argues for a pragmatic view of political ecology that engages with others outside the academy "thus pursuing political ends [particularly] in a development context" (Blaikie 2012: 234). Such an engaged political ecology would explore *practices* as well as discourses and hence calls for a careful empirical investigation of the social world that takes into account the contributions of environmental science (Burke and Shear 2014). In turn, Paulson highlights "the importance of studying social dynamics together with material dimensions of the environment" to evince "the power relations that shape and pervade all human interactions" (Paulson *et al.* 2005: 29). Indeed, for Castree, environmental 'goods' and 'bads' "are phenomena framed discursively and practically by capitalists" hence political ecology inquiries shall be answered "discursively and practically [as they] may, literally, determine the future of life on this planet" (Castree 2015: 290-291).

In turn, Latin American Political Ecology (see below) has come into this debate by challenging the discursive power of the "rampant forces of global capital" highlighting "the reinvention of cultural identities, [...] the rescuing and reconstruction of traditional knowledge [that] occurs precisely in the encounter of conflicting rationalities, as well as through intercultural hybridization and a dialogue of knowledges" (Leff 2015: 49; see

also Machado 2010). The notions of concern to this PhD arose from this discursive contestation. In this line of enquiry and keeping with the idea of conducting politically-engaged research, this PhD explores the dynamic inter-play between discourse and the material dimensions among and between the various actors both in the promotion of and opposition to green capitalism in Ecuador. It does so by analysing the material deployments associated to the notions of *buen vivir*, the rights of nature or *pachamama* and territory situating them all within contemporary environmental discourses such as sustainable development (Bryant 2000, Kull *et al.* 2015).

Discursive and post-structuralist approaches have been criticised by some for overlooking the interactions between local communities and global forces (Peet and Watts 2004), for failing to address the materiality of narratives, or for focusing only in explaining power symmetries, rather than asymmetries, and “environmental truth claims” (Forsyth 2008: 761). Such approaches have been similarly criticized for taking the deconstruction agenda too far, as Blaikie puts it: a post-structuralist approach “seldom attempts to fill the vacuum which results from deconstruction with its own version of environmental or social truth” (Blaikie 1999: 142). But instead of seeing it as a tension between post-structuralist and structuralist-Marxist political ecology, Watts (2015) affirms that in the 1990s political ecology added up to Marx’s ‘regimes of accumulation’, Foucault’s ‘regimes of truth’ and Gramsci’s ‘regimes of rule or hegemony’ (Watts 2015: 34).

Similar turning points can be identified in political ecology as with the other social sciences. Whereas in the 1970s structural Marxist analyses dominated the discipline, it has now spread out into a number of theoretical approaches. For example: a locally determined discursive and participatory political ecology (Forsyth 2008); development and post-development political ecology that explores the resistance to development from place-based politics (Escobar 2008) but also rejects “any aprioristic assumption of resistance or opposition” to development (Biersack and Greenberg 2006: 21). Political ecology of difference, which assumes an intersectional stance nurtured by feminist, new social movements and post-colonial studies (Watts 2015), contributing to an understanding of “power distributed unevenly but [indeed] distributed”, hence to “a post-colonial historiography that renders ‘subalterns’ subjects of their own history” (Biersack and Greenberg 2006: 23-24). Neo-Marxist political ecology that draws attention to global dynamics of capital accumulation and the effects on a global environment (Peet *et al.* 2011) or highlights the “different regimes of capital accumulation operating at multiple scales and through complex chains of causation” (Watts 2015: 32). Related to this last point is an emerging line of inquiry into the

political ecology of commodification and neoliberalization of nature that uses a political economy framework to assess the materiality of resources, access and power relations (Bakker 2010, 2015, Apostolopoulou and Adams 2014, Osborne 2015, Scales 2015).

Biersack and Greenberg (2006: 4-5), describes at least five *theoretical re-orientations* of the field:

1. Analyses that distinguish symbolic and material explanations and how they influence each other.
2. Strong critique to the human/nature separation, where expressions such as, “social”, “second”, or “produced” nature have been articulated. Here, nature is the by-product of human conceptualizations, activities and regulations (see section 2.4 on Nature).
3. Local and global articulations, the prominent emergence of “place” (see section 2.5 on Territory).
4. Analyses that focus on the agency of the exploited, including nature, and everyday practices that compound power.
5. Analyses that highlight the intersection between inequalities, from class, to gender and ethnicity. This strand acknowledges the different forms in which the human/nature articulation occurs.

Political ecology has maintained a “multifaceted research agenda over the past 4 decades influenced by diverse critical research perspectives that all aim to relate environmental and ecological processes to socio-economic and political dynamics” (Swyngedouw 2015: 131). In summary, the *topics* investigated, have been quite varied, but for the purposes of this thesis, I have concentrated on studies relating to: neoliberal environmentalism and sustainable development (Prudham 2007, Bakker 2010, 2015, de Freitas *et al.* 2015, Hope 2017), green capitalism (Prudham 2009, Vaccaro *et al.* 2013, Apostolopoulou and Adams 2014, Scales 2015), the dialectics of commodification and marketization under diverse property regimes (Castree 2001, Robbins 2012), the role of the state (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995, McAfee and Shapiro 2010) and of the non-governmental sector (Bryant 2005), the production of socationatures (Castree and Braun 2001, Swyngedouw 2006, 2015, Kaika 2006, Castree 2013) and the role of territory and social struggle in place-based community politics (Li 2004, Escobar 2008).

A recurrent political ecology research topic, which effectively connects us to the next subsection – i.e. Latin American Political Ecology - has been North-South and world-

class relations. For some, political ecology uses “dependency”, “world-system theory” and “core-periphery” theories (Wallerstein 2001, Dos Santos 2002) to understand the geopolitical and historical character of environmental problems (Zimmerer and Bassett 2003, Bryant 2015, Watts 2015). Hence the study of the so-called Global South, including Latin America, assesses the effects of decades of capitalist development, notably in its production of highly unequal access to natural resources and associated conflicts, and the international division of labour (Bryant and Bailey 1997, Bryant 2000). Literature focused on Latin America investigates how the region is produced through enduring colonial relations and internal colonialism but also through relations of resistance and anti-colonialism (Perreault 2014). As the region is widely seen as being rife with environmental and social injustice, some writers also seek to identify how positive change can occur, particularly through appropriate international development (Bebbington 2000, Biersack and Greenberg 2006, Andolina *et al.* 2009). Certainly, for Watts, “the politics” of the discipline was not only in the critical analysis, but also in the social intention (Watts 1997): to study the world in order to transform it (see also Forsyth 2008, Burke and Shear 2014). This intention was undoubtedly at the base of political ecology research that is produced *in* Latin America (Alimonda 2005, Leff 2015).

Latin American Political ecology (LAPE) is understood here as a scholarly and activist theoretical production being carried out *in* Latin America (rather than only *on* the region), and which is rapidly developing. It has been said for Anglo-American political ecology that it does not own a set of coherent concepts or theories, or authors that identify themselves as political ecologists. Rather, Anglo-American political ecology has developed a series of common methods and lines of enquiry, constituting a “community of practice” that produces “a certain kind of text” (Robbins 2012: 5) but without “a common theoretical point of reference” (Watts 2015: 32). Likewise, Latin American political ecologists share a common *interest* in explaining the exacerbated ecological conflicts occurring at present in the region, and define them as conflicts shaped by global post-colonial relations of production (Toledo 1996, Alimonda 2005, Durand Smith *et al.* 2011, Latorre *et al.* 2015). Indeed, some authors are becoming more interested in criticizing the system of modern coloniality rather than capitalism solely, hence calling for a decolonial future (Escobar 2007, 2015, Machado 2012, Alimonda 2011, 2015). However still in need of a common theory, decolonial Latin American political ecologists are trying to incorporate indigenous epistemology to the widely used political economy framework (Toledo 1999, Leff 2006, 2015, Machado 2012). In doing so, they engage lately with a number of concepts, including “nature”, “*buen vivir*” and

“indigenous territory”, which appear central and intertwined (Acosta and Martínez 2009, 2011, Asher and Ojeda 2009, Gudynas 2009, 2011, 2014, Escobar 2008, Aliste and Stamm 2016). These concepts are recurrently cited by the main authors who identify themselves (or their work) as part of the growing field of Latin American political ecology. Since the aim of this PhD is to carry out a detailed inquiry into the characteristics of these terms in order to contribute to LAPE, what follows is an account of such scholarly production. It is also an attempt to describe what makes LAPE different from political ecology carried out elsewhere, but particularly in the Anglo-American world, and to position myself as a Latin American political ecologist.

For political ecology that is produced in Latin America a major theme has been the character of the society-nature relationship involved in North-South relations of domination and subordination (e.g. Alimonda 2005, 2007, Leff 2006, 2015, Machado 2009, 2012). Here, the aim is to investigate the social and environmental interaction from a historical and material perspective, and “to know the [local] ideas and understandings about nature and the human-nature relationship” (Durand *et al.* 2011: 289). The emergence of LAPE coincided with a growing interest in studying the myriad of socio-environmental conflicts that have arisen across the region. Two approaches to the study of conflict are predominant. One is the ecological distributional conflicts approach strongly influenced by the writings of Joan Martínez-Alier and his colleagues whom connects political ecology to ecological economics (Martínez-Alier 2002, Martínez-Alier *et al.* 2011, Latorre *et al.* 2015). This approach emphasises the analysis of material and energy fluxes linked to specific social modes of perceiving and using nature under the notion of ‘sociometabolism’ (Delgado Ramos 2013a, 2013b, Aliste and Stamm 2016). The other approach considers socio-ecological conflicts as evidence of relations of coloniality (Escobar 2007, Alimonda 2015) and associated material and symbolic political disputes that foster ecological change (Durand Smith *et al.* 2011). Here, there is often a tendency to explore the different rationalities and systems of knowledge at play in the contemporary world of Latin America (Leff 2002, 2015, Molina 2012).

A pioneer scholar is Mexican Enrique Leff, for whom LAPE has evolved from a wider tradition of Latin American thought, encompassing Latin American-based Marxism (e.g. the Peruvian writer José Carlos Mariátegui), liberation pedagogy (e.g. Brazil’s Paulo Freire) and eco-pedagogy (e.g. the Brazilian scholar Leonardo Boff) (Alimonda 2007, Leff 2015). Meanwhile, dependency theory – both in its Marxist and liberal strands (e.g. Dos Santos 2002, Marini 2008[1973], see Beigel 2010 for a historical account) - and liberation theology (Dussel 2002) delineated the unequal North-South power relations

afflicting the region as well as proposed a theory of emancipation based in social movements experience. More recently, the emergence of decolonial thinking, “widened the scope of analysis further from political economy to also encompass cultural modes of power, domination and resistance” (Leff 2015: 48).

Indeed, Latin American political ecologists from the start have considered that the field must study “the historical relations between different social forms and their environment” (Leff 1994: 141, see also Toledo 1996), notably with a focus on unequal power relationships underpinning a global capitalism. While affirming this abiding connection, current research also attributes nature appropriation and the emergence of ecological conflicts to the expansion of Modernity as the dominant political order, arguing that it constructs nature as a “colonial object” while it “racialises the peoples” of “Nuestra América” (or “Our America” in the words of Machado 2009: 5; see also Machado 2010). Moreover, these conflicts are a consequence of the suppression of all other forms of relationship between nature and humans that may challenge the primordial dichotomy attributed to modern thought (Leff 2001, 2015, Alimonda 2011). Modernity, in this research perspective, promotes endless economic growth, a homogenizing development model and an estrangement between humans and nature; as such, a new perspective on development and nature must be elaborated (Leff 2002, Cajigas-Rotundo 2007, Gudynas 2011, 2014). In fact, for some authors, a critical 'decolonial' spirit is precisely embodied in ideas about *buen vivir* and the rights of nature that are of major interest to this PhD (e.g. Escobar 2010, Acosta 2013a, Prada 2014, Caria and Domínguez 2016). Hence, such decolonial thinking merits a closer look here.

In such thought, the concept of coloniality is key. The gist of this notion is that the world has passed from a status of modern colonialism to one in the current era best labelled as global coloniality (Coronil 2000, Quijano 2000, 2007, Mignolo 2001). Because while colonialism describes political and institutional arrangements that a given society designs to restrain other societies' sovereignty, coloniality refers to broader and more diffuse forms of control and applications of power as constitutive elements of modernity (Mignolo 2000, Quijano 2000). Coloniality is thus revealed as “the necessary and opposite, but systematically hidden, complement of modernity” (Alimonda 2011: 26).

In this context, colonial difference, which may be thought of as the space/time that exists between hegemonic and subaltern knowledges, is thus a core reference for both disclosure and resistance: that is, it is a key reference for an emancipatory project (Grosfoguel 2007). And, in this regard, “political ecology is not only a scientific

discipline but a theoretical-practical field, a new territory of critical thought and political action” (Leff 2006: 21). In fact, political ecologists conceive of themselves as being an integral part of the struggles as “allies that reflect, speak and write” about shifting social realities (Garcés 2007: 237). So, Latin American political ecology is thus necessarily built both on theoretical reflections inspired by “‘other’ knowledge systems – often labelled ‘local knowledge’, ‘popular wisdom’ or ‘folk science’ [in sum] ‘non-Western understandings of the world’” (Leff 2015: 48) and on the concrete political experiences of indigenous and local peoples of the region (Escobar 2001, 2008, Machado 2012), as this PhD, too, will illustrate.

In this sense, indigenous and local peoples in Latin America, who are viewed by political ecologists as producing hybrid sorts of knowledge and socionatures in the interstices of the colonial modern system (Garcés 2007, Hope 2017), are also seen by them as capable of re-signifying modernity in “subversive complicity” with it (Sluyter 2002: 2). At the same time, indigenous peoples are seen as the legitimate defenders of territories increasingly beset by processes of neoliberalization and commodification (Hope 2017). But for the Argentinian scholar Horacio Machado, the panorama here is not so simple, as immense Latin American cultural diversity generates specific and varied regimens of production and domination in “a complex process of dialectical inter-relation and mutual transformation of human societies and the natural environment that surrounds them” (Machado 2015: para.20). Whatever the variations, though, political ecologists insist on distancing themselves from essentialist approaches that consider nature and indigenous peoples as a-historic entities, as well as from constructivist stances that see nature as a de-materialized representation of ‘reality’. Rather, the aim is the study of multiple connections between history and biology and the unavoidable cultural mediations (Escobar 2008).

The emancipatory process (Leff 2015) thus implies a process of ‘decoloniality’, for which it is necessary to end with the exclusions derived from epistemic, spiritual, racial/ethnic and genre/sexual hierarchies deployed by modernity (Mignolo 2007, Grosfoguel 2007, Machado 2009). For scholars following this approach, political ecology requires a critique of hegemonic (i.e. ‘modern’) knowledge, as well as a new language and set of epistemologies because the “relations between human beings, and between them and nature, are constructed by power relations – of knowledge, of production, of appropriation of nature - and through the processes of ‘normalization’ of ideas, discourses, behaviours and policies” (Leff 2006: 26). Crucially therefore, the decolonial process necessitates that scholars think outside the Euro-North American hegemonic knowledge system, producing instead knowledge and thinking precisely



from colonial difference while simultaneously appealing to subaltern knowledge-systems (Coronil 2000). In this vein, Héctor Alimonda criticizes the compartmentalization of scientific knowledge attributed to modern understandings of nature and asserts instead that political ecology ought to focus on the “space of confluence of questioning and mutual nurturing among diverse scientific fields” (Alimonda 2005: 68). Hence cross-fertilization amongst different knowledge pathways is encouraged as part of a wider critique of hegemonic scientific-technological development under capitalism (Delgado Ramos 2013a).

For Latin American political ecologists, nature is seen as a subaltern *space*, which was colonized and homogenised by modernity in order to exploit it – that is why the process of decolonization is seen to be pivotal (Cajigas-Rotundo 2007, Delgado Ramos 2013b). The diversity of natures (in the plural), they argue, is hidden as well as the types of knowledge and world-visions associated with them, as notably manifested in the histories of indigenous peoples across Latin America (Escobar 2007, Alimonda, 2011). Hence, a political ecology of 'difference' (or 'emancipation' for Enrique Leff 2015) reveals those hidden natures, while recognizing colonial difference in the form of subaltern knowledges and practices attached to diverse ecologies, ethics, spiritualities and rationalities (Toledo 1999, Camacho 2012). In doing that, it acknowledges not only the richness of other sorts of knowledge, but also the ever-changing context that produces difference in the first place (Escobar 2001, 2008, Sluyter 2002, Garcés 2007, Vaccaro *et al.* 2013).

For many scholars the incorporation of key terms such as *sumak kawsay* and *suma qamaña*, as well as the recognition of the rights of nature or *pachamama* in Ecuador and Bolivia's normative structure are steps towards a decoloniality agenda in Latin America. How far such incorporation contributes to an alternative environmental politics is to be assessed in this PhD.

## 2.2 Environmentalism

From a Western or Northern perspective, environmentalism has become a standard set of principles for defining how different human groups understand nature and the human-nature relationship, and what kind of political activity are they prone to take for tackling what they perceived as environmental problems (Heynen *et al.* 2007, Bebbington and Humphreys-Bebbington 2009). The literature specifies three strands of thought here: one that establishes the supremacy of humans over nature, usually identified with techno-centric thinking; another that assumes that nature defines and constrains human behaviour, long associated with ecocentric perspectives; and a third

one that recognises the essential interconnection and interdependence between humans and the surrounding world (Guha 1989, Castree 2001, 2013). The first two affirm a separation between humans and nature while the third challenges such a dichotomy.

In keeping with this three-fold framing, Guha and Martínez-Alier (1997) label the different environmentalisms as the 'cult of wilderness', the 'gospel of eco-efficiency' and the 'ecologism of the poor'. The 'cult of wilderness' has its origins in the first natural reserves established in the United States a century or more ago to protect a 'rediscovered' original nature. Here, the main aim was strict conservation of 'pristine' landscapes through fixed borders (Martínez-Alier 2002). The reasons given for this endeavour ranged from symbolic utilitarianism (e.g. nature gives us peace) to moral and spiritual reasons (e.g. the right of non-human species to exist), configuring an ecological spirituality best represented by the fervour of deep ecology (Humphrey 2000, Pepper 2003). Although in theory such ecocentric thinking denies any separation between humanity and nature, its main political initiative – the establishment of natural enclosures that permit "human visitors but not human inhabitants" - has nonetheless promoted the systematic exclusion of local human populations (Martínez-Alier 2002: 3, see also Guha 1989, Bryant 2000, Heynen *et al.* 2007, Apostolopoulou and Adams 2014).

The 'gospel of eco-efficiency' perspective discussed by Guha and Martínez-Alier has challenged deep ecology accusing it of essentialism and post-materialism (Guha and Martínez-Alier 1997). However, this strand also proposes nature enclosures as a way to protect nature, even as it assumes that adverse environmental impacts are failures of the capitalist economic system that can be adjusted by the implementation of adequate compensatory strategies. Through concepts like sustainable development and ecological modernization this techno-centric strand aligns with market-optimism and, recently, green capitalism (Brand 2012, Kothari *et al.* 2014) as it is examined in this PhD in relation to Ecuadorian environmentalism.

Despite the fact that both strands of environmentalism acknowledge that the separation between the social and natural spheres is the cause of environmental crises, they still aim to overcome such a separation through one of two ways: commodification or mystification (Guha and Martínez-Alier 1997). Commodification is supported by the notion of sustainable development and associated market optimism, thus it firmly embeds nature in the market (Cock 2011). There is a paradox here: in order to save it, external nature has to be internalized into human existence via the market (McAfee

2016). In turn, mystification emerges as a remedy for the alienation intrinsic to the capitalist system that fosters spatial and temporal separation between humans and nature (Peet *et al.* 2011: 14). Alienation leads to the individualistic and competitive societies distinctive of capitalism; being alienated from nature, human existence becomes meaningless and hopeless. The response is 'environmental sanctimony' and the deification of nature, which serves the function of offering meaning to people in a purposeless world. Thus, alienated humans seek a post-material reconstruction of the relationship with nature, with romantic appreciations of the natural world beyond human society and its destructive power relationships (Pepper 1993, Peet *et al.* 2011). But such appreciations are simply co-opted and commodified by capitalism (Castree 2000, Henderson 2009).

Finally, Guha and Martínez-Alier (1997) propose the existence of an 'ecologism of the poor' (or a 'popular ecologism') that will challenge the other sorts of environmentalist thought just noted and which emanate from the North (see also, Doherty and Doyle 2006, Doyle and Chaturbedi 2010). Concurrently, it appeals to "indigenous territorial rights" as well as to perceptions about "the sacredness of Nature in order to defend and secure their livelihood" (Martínez-Alier 2002: 11). It is true that popular ecologism also proposes the establishment of natural enclosures but, unlike the other two types of environmentalism, the purpose of those enclosures would be to protect the material bases of human reproduction, thereby offering a quite different vision of *integrated* human-nature dynamics. A prime example of this was the extraction reserves established by the *seringueiros* (rubber tappers) in the Brazilian Amazon, where the intention was to protect rubber trees that were the basis of local livelihoods (Porto Gonçalves 2009). While such an integrative vision at the heart of popular ecologism has notably been centred on the plight of peoples living in the global South, it finds echoes in the environmental justice movement in the global North, which also highlights the inequitable impacts of global capitalism (Martínez-Alier 2002).

As this PhD documents, these diverse interpretations of modern environmentalism find a resonance in the Ecuadorian context. Indeed, Varea and Barrera (1997) and Latorre-Tomás (2009) have identified three types of environmentalism that are present in the country: conservationism (technocentric), environmentalism (ecocentric) and critical ecologism (interdependence). As we shall see, the latter is certainly an ecologism of the poor, largely associated with socio-environmental conflicts in which 'popular ecologists' are usually seen as local people who defend their livelihoods from external threats often posed by the extractive industry (Martínez-Alier 2002, Martínez-Alier *et al.* 2011, Machado 2012, Molina 2012, Alimonda 2015, Aliste and Stamm 2016). Although

this three-fold framework classifies, and inevitably simplifies, a complex set of realities into three 'neat' categories, it nonetheless serves as a useful means initially to approach the sorts of environmentalism in Ecuador of concern to this thesis (see Bebbington and Humphreys-Bebbington 2009 for a different appreciation in which the 'ecologism of the poor' is split into 'ecologism of the livelihoods' and 'socio-environmental justice'). As we shall see, a set of critical reflections on this framework is offered in Chapter 8 in light of the empirical analysis of the thesis.

The popular ecologism is also regularly intertwined with indigenous knowledge-systems and worldviews (Toledo 1999, Leff 2006, 2015, Machado 2012). The thesis will precisely consider how the combination of indigenous perspectives and popular ecologism proceeds – for it is far from being a straightforward process. Thus, in Ecuador, critical ecologism is sometimes accused of being too-ready to assimilate indigenous thought with post-material environmentalism, thereby suppressing its historical richness and specificity (Bebbington and Humphreys-Bebbington 2009, Fontaine 2007, Sánchez-Parga 2011, 2014), and perpetuating the myth of the 'good savage' now transformed into the 'ecological native' (Ulloa 2004).

Certainly, the point is not to "romanticize all 'traditional' knowledge but rather to assess how far such knowledge can be a basis for alternatives to current development pathways" (Cederlöf 2015: 657). In searching for alternatives, Hope (2017), describes how indigeneity is being mobilized and entangled with environmental concerns in ways relevant to wider conservation and environmental debates. With a focus on Bolivia, she argues that the "perception of indigeneity as synonymous with living harmoniously with nature" would be politically fruitful but only if "the hybrid ideas about nature and conservation that are being subsequently voiced" are acknowledged as "a partial product of longer histories and experiences" (Hope 2017: 75-77). Indeed, it appears that the type of environmentalism a social group would perform is related, or at least strongly influenced, to the ways in which such group has come to understand *nature*. There is much at stake here, both intellectually and practically speaking, and thus this PhD investigates the inter-connections of specific approaches such as critical ecologism with indigenous perspectives via the conceptual articulation of nature in connection to *buen vivir* and territory.

Nature is a contested concept in political ecology. For example, Noel Castree describes at least three approaches in which humans relate to nature parallel to the above categorizations: the technocratic 'people and environment' approach parallel to 'the gospel of eco-efficiency'; the ecocentric 'nature first' approach, similar to the 'cult of

wilderness'; and the social approach, which could be equated to 'popular ecologist' or, more precisely, the kind of environmentalism that recognizes the interconnectedness of humans and nature (Castree 2001, 2013).

It is to be determined which perspective about nature is apparent in the sort of environmentalisms I will be analysing in this PhD, particularly when addressing how Ecuadorian environmentalism tackles the notions of *pachamama*, the rights of nature or the idea of *buen vivir* as 'living in harmony with nature' (Hope 2017). But before turning to the concept of nature in the next section, it is helpful to further explore the type of the environmentalism that gave rise to 'green capitalism' and the political ecology insight into this phenomenon, whether, 'mainstream', 'hegemonic', 'neoliberal' or 'market-based' environmentalism. Mainstream conservation practice, well documented in political ecology (see for example Bryant 2000, Watts 2002, Himley 2009, Brockington and Duffy 2010, Vaccaro *et al.* 2013, Apostolopoulou and Adams 2014, Hope 2015, McAfee 2016), has been critiqued and sometimes modified towards a policy that was more inclusive of people (e.g. Nash 2000), only to return later to strict conservation in the guise of creating new 'green' commodities such as carbon credits (Böhm *et al.* 2012, Lohmann 2014, Osborne 2015, Asiyambi 2016) – a matter to which I return in Chapter 5.

### **2.3 Sustainable development and green capitalism**

From the outset, political ecology literature highlighted the effects of the capitalist system on nature, revealing it as a system of exploitation and destruction of both humans and nature (M. O'Connor 1994, Bryant and Bailey 1997, Forsyth 2003, Peet *et al.* 2011). Such verification gave rise to the environmental movements in the 1960-1970 decades (Castree 2001). But political ecology has also considered the role of environmentalist thinking in *supporting* the capitalist system (Crook and Clapp 2002, Watts 2002, Barron 2005, Scales 2015, McAfee 2016), as well as exploring the role of the latest stage of capitalism: neoliberalism (Prudham 2009, Bakker 2010, 2015, Renfrew 2011, de Freitas *et al.* 2015, Hope 2017). Mainstream environmentalism, it is suggested, tends to ignore historically unequal power relationships over access to and use of nature, promoting instead the adoption of market-based solutions for environmental crises (Bryant 1997, Crook and Clapp 2002, de Freitas *et al.* 2015) or, in other words, forcing nature to produce for the capitalist market in order to exist (J. O'Connor 1994). Hence, the mainstream environmental movement is seen as "dead, co-opted by the very capitalist power it once tried to fight, reincarnated as little more than green capitalism" (Smith 2006: xiii).

Central to the mainstream environmentalism is sustainable development, a concept that is also at the root of green capitalism. Sustainable development assumes that economic growth under capitalism is a pre-requisite for both social wellbeing and environmental protection (Escobar 1995, Brand 2012, Kothari *et al.* 2014). Indeed, despite the long-standing links between capitalist interventions on the one side, and ensuing poverty and environmental degradation on the other, the articulation of sustainable development thinking has tended to assert that poverty *is* itself the main cause of environmental degradation (Osborne 2015). Therefore, economic growth is not only desirable but also mandatory, because, in addition to human suffering, poverty causes such degradation (Vallejo 2003). But critics argue that, from the very beginning, sustainable development was set out as a means to manage environmental problems within “markets, prices and capital flows”, while simultaneously achieve profit and sustainability (Peet *et al.* 2011: 7, see also McAfee and Shapiro 2010, Cock 2011). Moreover, various conservation mechanisms that followed this path show in fact a persistent “fear of the poor and of their claims to resources” (Asiyanbi 2016: 150).

In this context, *buen vivir*, one of the research interest of this thesis, is seen as offering an alternative strategy to sustainable development and associated mainstream environmentalism precisely because it promotes a move away from the economic growth-focused development trajectories (Hope 2017). The concept, say its enactors, is part of the Latin American critique of a capitalist development model imposed on the region by the ‘developed’ world (Altmann 2013b: 30). The term would be thus a conceptual legacy of the Andean peoples, defined by its promoters as a harmonious social coexistence between humans and nature (Simbaña 2011, Bretón *et al.* 2014), an alternative to sustainable development and the associated (modernist) ideologies of ‘progress’ and economic growth (Acosta 2013, Dávalos 2014, Sacher and Báez 2014). Hence, to explore *buen vivir* for its potential to offer an alternative politics to green capitalism (whether connected to the idea of rights of nature an territory or not) is also about building an alternative discourse to sustainable development. Hence this thesis follows the lead taken by political ecology to further investigate the observation that green capitalism is a new regime of capital accumulation sustained by an environmentalism that has sustainable development at the centre of its environmental thought (Barron 2005, Prudham 2007, 2009). As such, it is also seen as a new regime for framing the human-nature relationship (Brand 2013).

Green capitalism is understood and critically assessed in diverse ways in the literature. Perhaps the one that is most explored to date is its neoliberal version, green neoliberalism, a doctrine that locates the capitalist market firmly at the centre of

multiple environmental crises, that sees it as dictating the forms of ensuing environmental governance and, ultimately, shaping how nature itself is produced (Heynen *et al.* 2007, Bakker 2010, 2015, Renfrew 2011, de Freitas *et al.* 2015, Anthias and Radcliffe 2015, Hope 2017). Similarly, authors who use instead the term 'green capitalism' do so to refer to a particular kind of environmentalism that promotes the idea that nature might be saved *only* if it is included in the capitalist system (Barron 2005, Scales 2015). Here it is aligned with the ideology of market optimism, which expects that the laws of supply and demand regulate natural resources use, and hence will 'naturally' solve environmental crises (Robbins 2012, Rodríguez-Panqueva 2011). But critics respond by pointing out that the market has been incapable of stopping natural resource depletion; on the contrary, it has served only to legitimate accelerated pollution, environmental degradation and human exploitation (J. O'Connor 1994, Boyd and Goodman 2010, Brand 2013).

Nonetheless, a litany of allegedly green capitalist practices are put forward in the environmental mainstream literature – ranging from 'clean' technologies designed specifically to tidy up adverse effects of traditional forms of capitalist exploitation through 'clean' energy and development projects and on to 'exciting' new green markets via carbon and biodiversity offsetting mechanisms – to suggest a softer more benevolent sort of capitalism capable and indeed eager to integrate nature into the market as part of a wider maintenance of the status quo. Here, such thinking does not deny adverse environmental and social impacts linked to capitalism: instead, it proposes to manage them efficiently and effectively (Rodríguez-Panqueva 2011). In doing that, capitalism seeks to legitimate itself *and* diffuse social protest (O'Connor 1998).

Indeed, environmental crises are seen as a golden opportunity for business, a chance to usher in a new phase of capital accumulation (Smith 2007, Cock 2011). Such crises are “neither solved nor ignored in a green capitalist regime, but rather placed at the heart of its growth strategy” (Mueller and Passadakis 2009: 55). As Henderson (2009: 84) adds, “crisis is a use value during spasms of economic restructuring”. But although the rhetoric says that the 'going green' strategies of diverse industries will significantly reduce the exploitation of nature (Lee 2015), new socio-environmental conflicts are emerging all of the time that reveal the continuation of the model of exclusion and exploitation. For example, conflicts are breaking out due to the displacement of entire populations in order to grow crops for agrofuels (Altieri 2009), to built dams for 'clean energy' (Bakker 2007, Böhm *et al.* 2012), or to establish new natural enclosures for carbon storage or to protect carbon sinks (Lohmann 2011, 2012, Asiyambi 2016; see

also the examination of the *Programa Socio Bosque* in Chapter 5 below). Such conflicts are being referred to as the 'same old capitalism' by some social movements, particularly those of an indigenous and peasant character caught in the new firing line (Friedmann 2005).

In this respect, new socio-environmental conflicts might be the result of another phase of primitive accumulation that simultaneously reinforces the capitalist-world system, the international division of labour and post-colonial relationships (Harvey 2004). For Harvey (2004) social confrontation in capitalist centres is reduced by making space/time adjustments; over-accumulated capital is thus reallocated elsewhere around the world making it possible to repeat over and over again the process of primitive accumulation. Such accumulation may even include some of forms purportedly designed to protect nature nowadays via the creation of green commodities and green markets (J. O'Connor 1994).

However, some writers such as Brand and Wissen (2013) suggest a more complicated picture here (see also Böhm *et al.* 2012). They argue that, for green capitalism to become the dominant regime of capitalist accumulation, it will be necessary to transcend the current carbon-dependent economy. Hence, such capitalism refers to a de-carbonized economy that relies on renewable energy resources, genuine carbon emissions reduction and the enhancement of areas devoted to carbon sinks. And yet, the sheer power of the political lobby of oil companies and others for the status quo, as well as the high dependence on non-renewable energy by entire societies around the world suggest that the most likely scenario is a green form of capitalism operating unevenly across the globe, subordinated to a continuing form of fossil-fuel dependant capitalism (Brand and Wissen 2013: 1) and a world "characterized by uneven growth and disparities of income and by the unequal distribution of economic, social and environmental risks" (Böhm *et al.* 2012: 1620). However, even if green capitalism were to triumph over the current order (that is, if ecological efficiency and renewable energy production were to prevail over the current carbon-dependent market), all that would happen is that there would be a shift towards land and green 'grabbing' (Brand and Wissen 2013, 2015) trailing its own social and environmental inequities in the process.

This latter concern is taken up in this thesis where in Chapter 5 I analyse the *Programa Socio Bosque* (PSB) and how this program interacts with a new form of capitalism in Latin America that *could be* green. As asserted in the previous paragraph, green capitalism would operate unevenly across the globe, situating the forested countries of the Global South as carbon sinks providers. In Latin America it will indeed operate



through carbon markets, forest governance or land-grabbing (Apostolopoulou and Adams 2014), creating green commodities that do not necessarily imply a process of privatization of forested lands. As Osborne (2015) found in her case study in Mexico, while the forested lands are not formally privatized by green capitalist mechanisms, a type of proxy privatization occurs by which “new needs and desires are generated to obtain private property”, jeopardizing communal property and collective forms of living (Osborne 2015: 65). Another effect of such mechanisms is what Asiyambi (2016) reports as “the reduction of ‘community tenure’ to ‘forest use rights’” (Asiyambi 2016: 150). Writing about the effects of REDD+ in Nigeria, he shows how through the discourse of community’s land rights the state ensures land tenure for REDD+ while “foresters [are] reluctant to yield full control over the forest to communities” (Asiyambi 2016: 150). Moreover, it appears that REDD+ is in fact modifying previous land tenure systems according to its interests while leading to “militarised protectionism” and a “new exclusionary forest economy” namely “carbonized exclusion and elite accumulation” (Asiyambi 2016: 152). These are very serious outcomes of green capitalist mechanisms on forest and local communities, which will be assessed in extent when analysing the PSB in Ecuador.

Land privatization as part of green commodities production is another concern of political ecology’s literature on green capitalism (Castree 2003, Lohmann 2014). For this PhD, it is crucial to understand how the production of socio-natures changes through the commodification process. For Neil Smith, the production of ‘green’ commodities expresses the dialectical relationship between first and second nature (Smith 2010, see section 2.4). For example, first nature can be commodified from second nature if the value of a tree as a carbon sink is greater than its value as wood (Barron 2005). The tree as carbon sink is thought to be first nature, while the tree as wood is thought to be second, humanly produced nature. Smith (2010) describes two types of commodities made up from nature in this context: 1) ‘traditional’ commodities made up from raw materials, and 2) commodities made up of created scarcity that “allows certain natural destruction” (Smith 2007: 20). In the first case, nature feeds industrial capitalism and, in the process, it is transformed into concrete things (such as wood, oil, minerals, food). In the second case, commodities can be material elements of ‘protected’ nature (a preserved forest, a non-polluted river) or *promises* to preserve it (e.g. carbon credits). The latter commodities comprise alternatives to industrial-linked environmental degradation, even though they promote nature objectification and commodification. Chapter 5 investigates which kind of commodities the PSB is contributing to.

A final consideration of this section relates to the findings from a number of studies that have uncovered connections between green capitalism and *buen vivir* (Kothari *et al.* 2014, Bell 2016, McAfee 2016). For these scholars, *buen vivir* does indeed represent a viable counter-narrative to the hegemonic idea that environmental crises can be resolved through the capitalist market. For Kathleen McAfee (2016: 348), *buen vivir* is incompatible with conventional markets, as the former “connotes values and measures of well-being that are material as well as social but that cannot be reduced to monetary prices and may not be quantifiable or commensurable across places and cultures”. Meanwhile, for Kothari and colleagues (2014) the main feature of the *buen vivir* concept (and other alternatives they analyse) is that they are part of the “long search for and practice of alternative ways of living forged in the furnace of humanity’s struggle for emancipation and enlightenment” (Kothari *et al.* 2014: 366, see also Humphreys 2016), adding that they come from “non-capitalist communities, and therefore break with the anthropocentric and androcentric logic of capitalism”. However, this latter view is mistaken. True, there are aspects of some Latin American indigenous peoples’ practices that are not mediated by capitalist relations; nonetheless, most of them are “at least partially converted to the logics of so-called capitalist modernity” (Sacher and Báez 2014: 24), even as those practices are best understood as dynamic processes in permanent tension with modernity (Sluyter 2002, Garcés 2007). Lastly, Bell (2016: 73) locates *buen vivir* firmly in opposition to the green capitalism as the former is “currently promoted by socialist or anti-capitalist leaning states [while the latter] is typically promoted by capitalist states”. However this view is also reductionist, failing for instance to note the complex character of the so-called socialist or anti-capitalist states of Latin America<sup>7</sup>.

Such uncertainty underscores the need to be clear about what green capitalism entails and to what extent the rationale of the concepts under investigation opposes it, as this PhD aims to do.

In summary, from political ecology perspectives, green capitalism is revealed as a system that produces nature directly as a commodity for exchange in new green markets, even as it systematically ignores different possibilities of nature appreciation related to non-capitalist economies (Barron 2005). As such, green capitalism sustains the semiotic conquest over nature to transform it into ‘natural capital’; a particular vision about what nature is and a regime aiming to regulate how humans relate to nature

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Delgado-Ramos (2013a) or Lang and Mokrani (2013).

based in the separation between cultural and natural worlds, characteristic of modernity (Escobar 1995, Brand 2013). In this same line of thought, Smith (2010) proposes that nature is produced, and hence conceived, by capitalist societies in some unprecedented ways, and that such production occurs within a particular rationality that boosts the notion of an external nature separated from humanity for instrumental purposes (see also Henderson 2009). How nature is conceived and produced by capitalism is to be reviewed next.

## 2.4 Nature

To understand and describe the relationship between humans and nature under capitalism is a main focus of both human geography and political ecology (Castree 2000, 2003, 2013, Humphrey 2000, Castree and Braun 2001, Demeritt 2002, Ekers and Loftus 2012, Latorre *et al.* 2015, Swyngedouw 2015). Scholars agree that under capitalism the separation between humans and nature, though not new, has reached unprecedented proportions (Escobar 1995, Smith 2010). Such separation, continue the critiques, allows space for conceptualizing a pristine, non-human nature in need of conservation from human action. Threatened non-human nature is then internalised in the capitalist production process to produce exchange value (M. O'Connor 1994, Castree 2003, Smith 2006, 2010) because, under capitalism, nature might be saved *only* if it is included in the capitalist system in a way that screens out unsanctioned human involvement (McAfee 1999, 2016, Barron 2005, Cock 2011, Brand and Wissen 2015). The latter consideration is fundamental to the advancement of a green capitalism and provides the theoretical ground for some initiatives that aims to conserve nature, as the *Programa Socio Bosque*, and hence is of particular interest for this PhD.

As was noted above, Noel Castree describes three ways in which people relate to nature: the technocratic “people and environment” approach, the ecocentric “nature first” and the social approach (Castree 2001, 2013). Castree critiques the first two approaches for how they understand nature, which, he says, is reduced to three forms: external nature, intrinsic nature and universal nature. External nature is indeed outside humanity and it is “the raw material from which society is built” (Smith 2010: 2), a dualism that lies at the base of modern thought (Escobar 1995); this nature needs to be preserved away from humans. Intrinsic nature refers to the essential characteristic of something, and it is applied both to external nature as well as to human nature. Universal nature, in turn, encompasses everything, including humans; it is comparable to the notion of *Gaia* (Castree 2001: 7) and certainly, in some sense it is also

comparable to the notions of *pachamama* that circulate today in Ecuador (see Chapter 1).

For Castree these three forms of understanding nature assume that nature can be understood “as it is”, either by scientific or non-scientific methods, hence presuming that nature is a fixed and unchangeable entity, without history. Nature, then, can be measured and managed towards a supposedly balanced and “natural” state before (or beyond) human history. But “the truth about nature”, continues Castree, “varies depending on the perspective of the analysis” as “social biases and political interests” will always influence the objectiveness of the observations about nature (Castree 2001: 9). Despite this, the claims about knowing “nature as it is” are commonly used “as instruments of power and domination” (Castree 2001: 9, see also Castree 2013). In a similar vein, Erik Swyngedouw (2015) claims that nature continues to be seen as an empty signifier that encapsulates an infinite number of meanings that “express what nature should be”; a norm against to which measure deviation, such as “the desire to restore true (original but now lost) humane harmony by retro-fitting the world to ecological balance”, the fantasy of naturalness, of a “nature that serves as ‘the Other’ that guides us to redemption”. Hence, continues Swyngedouw, they all attempt to “fixate [nature’s] unstable meaning while presenting it as a fetishized ‘Other’” (2015: 132-134).

In contrast to this articulation of nature, other authors argue in favour of a “social nature”, a term to signify “nature that has been humanly produced through conceptualization as well as [material] activity” (Biersack and Greenberg 2006: 14; also Castree 2001, 2013, Demeritt 2002, Eker and Loftus 2012, Swyngedouw 2015). Social nature has been the subject of debate since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century when geographers and political ecologists from the Marxist, post-Marxist, feminist, anti-racist, post-structuralist and post-colonial strands began to critically analyse the approaches to nature described at the beginning of this section (Castree 2001). According to Castree, the first contribution was that ideas of external, intrinsic and universal nature are themselves socially produced (Castree 2013). From that departure point, the debate has expanded. For example, Demeritt (2002), assessed scholarly work on the social construction of nature, finding that it is organized around two strands: scholars that refer to concepts around nature as socially constructed and those that refer to the literal construction of nature in a physical sense. Similarly, Castree (2001: 6) adds: “nature is both a concept and all those physical things to which the concept refers”.

Nature is social in three different ways, or at three different 'intensities'. Firstly, nature is constructed through knowledge, (i.e. different groups of people have different understandings of what nature is), a construction that is strongly influenced by class, gender, race and colonial relations; defined by ideology or discourse and mediated by power (Castree 2013). Secondly, societies do not relate, engage or interact with nature differently, but what exists is 'socionatures' (Swyngedouw 2006). The concept of socionatures depicts an idea in which the physical attributes of what is called 'nature' will be different depending on how different societies use nature, but this does not deny the physical existence of trees or jaguars, rather it highlights that "the physical characteristics of nature are *contingent* upon social practices, they are not fixed" (Castree 2001: 13; emphasis in the source).

However, the third is the more complex of social nature understandings: that "societies [could] *physically reconstitute* nature both intentionally and unintentionally", that is, that "nature has become *internal* to social processes" (Castree 2001: 15, emphasis in the source). This is done in three ways: producing nature literally through techno-science (seeds, viruses, clones, etc.); producing manufactured natures as by-products of industrial capitalism (waste, chemicals, pollution, sicknesses) and producing a 'first nature' (Castree 2013) that needs protection from humans (natural reserves, endangered species). Here, nature is simply re-configured as an accumulation strategy insofar as a 'pristine' landscape devoid of human existence is primed for future green markets (Smith 2007, Henderson 2009). This latter form of producing nature will be explored in depth in this PhD, both in the analysis of the *Programa Socio Bosque* and of community-based conservation practices at Tola Chica community.

From this perspective, Marxists authors understand nature within the setting of social labour theory, with labour located at the centre of an understanding of nature (e.g. Heynen *et al.* 2007, Smith 2010, Ekers and Loftus 2012). As Michael Watts (2015) insists "rather than seeing environmental questions through the prism of society *and* nature, [...] political ecology drawing on Marxist ideas of the labour process and notions of first and second nature saw nature and society as dialectically constituted" (2015: 31). This idea was notably espoused by Neil Smith (2010). For Smith, when humans labour nature, they transform it while, at the same time, they transform their own human nature (Smith 2010). Therefore, 'produced nature' is a phenomenon that describes the social construction of nature *through* labour, which simultaneously produces human nature as well (Henderson 2009). Because when humans appropriate the elements of nature to fulfil their needs, they also "collectively produce their own

material life”, which encompass their physiology, their means of subsistence, their consciousness of human practice and their social relations (Smith 2010: 55).

In consequence, the relation of humans with nature is mediated by the mode of production and the power relationships that emanate from it. For Marxist scholars, the capitalist mode of production has historically changed from production in general, to production for exchange, to production for extended capital accumulation. So humanity has passed from producing use values for immediate human use, or first nature, according to Smith, to produce mainly exchange values, or second nature, that is commodities to be exchanged and consumed elsewhere in the capitalists market. Second nature, says Smith, contains, above all, exchange value; it is produced directly as commodities and “the use of material is regulated by the quantity of exchange-value its employment will bring, and this applies as much in the labour market as in the raw material market” (Smith 2010: 67). Exchange value defines, today, the relationship between humans and nature, something that was contested by the critical ecologists that succeeded in granting rights to nature in Ecuador (see Chapters 5 and 6).

But the distinction between first and second nature is not simply saying that first nature is use value and second nature is exchange value. For Smith, the relation between first and second nature is dialectical: “elements of the first nature, previously unaltered by human activity, are subject to the labour process and re-emerge to be the social matter of the second nature” (Smith 2010: 68). An important factor is the global *scale* in which nature is now produced, as “first nature is progressively produced from *within* and as *part* of the so-called second nature”, first nature is now “deprived of its firstness, its originality” (Smith 2010: 70). It appears, thus, that due to scale, first nature is produced as an abstraction (i.e. commodities) for extended accumulation or, as ‘accumulation strategy’ in the form of pristine nature in natural parks (Smith 2007). Indeed, for Smith, there is not first nature anymore, only “our notions of nature as Edenic, but this is always an ideal, abstract nature of the imagination [...] Human beings have produced whatever nature became accessible to them” (Smith 2010: 81).

Investigating how first nature is socially produced is a key aim of this PhD research, as it is central to the discussion on forest conservation initiatives, given that conservation discourse is mainly governed by an unreserved acceptance of an external nature in need of protection from humanity (Bryant 2000, Martínez-Alier 2002, Heynen *et al.* 2007, Apostolopoulou and Adams 2014). The concept is interesting, too, for framing the political ecology of environmentalism: as it becomes clear that the distinction between social and non-socially produced nature is futile, that is, if it is accepted that

nature is socially produced, the political activity of environmentalists and ecologists shall concentrate on defining how, and who produces nature, including first nature (Smith 2007).

However, although political ecologists and critical geographers widely accept that nature is socially produced (Demeritt 2002, Robbins 2012) and the concept is “now firmly on the agenda” (Swyngedouw 2015: 132), yet, for many, this idea is problematic because, for people living in the modern world, nature is precisely what is *not* socially produced. Geographers and other scholars have weighed into the debate here, suggesting that this thesis is anthropocentric (Bakker and Bridge 2006) and reductionist (Braun 2002), in that it reduces nature to “*nothing more* than a social construction”, obviating that nature actually exists without or beyond human action (Castree 2001: 16). There is also a material assertion: not all nature can be produced physically: the earth’s core, the solar system are not socially produced. Smith (2010) himself countered this argument by claiming that the only nature that is not socially produced is the one that is inaccessible (see above).

In turn, writers such as Ekers and Loftus (2012) have sought to rebut the sorts of claims against the production of socionatures. Thus, they argue that the theory of the production of nature challenges strict conservation environmentalism by usefully “fostering a fiercely de-naturalizing approach” as it “demonstrates the centrality of capitalism to contemporary nature-society relationships” in which labour is the key medium through which humans relate to nature (Ekers and Loftus 2012: 236). Hence, what is really at stake here is to comprehend the forms in which such labour occurs through everyday practice – requiring that scholars develop a “deeper socially and culturally textured account of practical activity” (Ekers and Loftus 2012: 235). Castree, too, claims that the social nature theory does not affirm a ‘hyper-constructionism’, rather, it calls for acknowledging that as much natural as nature is, “there is never any way to access, evaluate, and affect nature that does not involve socially specific knowledges and practices” (Castree 2001: 17, also Castree 2013).

Of relevance in this context and major area of research of this PhD is the notion of the rights of nature or *pachamama*. Thus far, there are various understandings of the concept. Sometimes *pachamama* or Mother Earth is universal nature, an “all-encompassing social-ecological set” that rejects the “duality between society and Nature” and recognises “the non-human as subjects” (Gudynas 2016:727, capital letter in the source; see also Acosta and Martínez 2011, Harris 2016). But more commonly, the ‘nature’ constituent of the rights of nature is presented as external to human

existence and a limit to economic development, as it is a legal strategy to stop environmental degradation in a context of predatory development (Acosta and Martínez 2011, Sacher and Báez 2014). Indeed, the Ecuadorian adoption of the concept is situated in the lengthy struggle against the oil industry (see Chapter 4) and thus “it is not always clear to which ‘parts’ of nature, rights can be said to belong” (Humphreys 2017: 472).

Another concern that has been identified by some writers is the recurrent reference to Mother Earth or *pachamama* as a feminine and deified figure, “a nurturing mother that gives birth, breeds and protects all her children”, contributing to the notion of external nature detached from the human sphere (Giraldo 2012: 228; see also Simbaña 2011, Gudynas 2016)<sup>8</sup>. Meanwhile the resulting dichotomy only facilitates the “de-naturalization of humans and the fetishist humanization of nature” even as “it fails to recognize the dual character of the Andean-Amazon cosmovision” (Sánchez-Parga 2014: 110-111). In practice, the humanisation of nature associated with Mother Earth imagery only serves to transform the magical dimension of Andean traditions into a meaningless mysticism; instead, it is argued, a different approach is needed in which nature is firmly integrated into human history (Sánchez-Parga 2011, 2014).

And yet, many indigenous intellectuals are seduced by this conceptualisation of *pachamama* and by the possibility of defending its rights, even though this understanding is seemingly closer to (a Western-based) deep ecology doctrine than to an indigenous cosmovision (Viola Recasens 2014, Erazo 2015). Still, there may be some strategic usefulness to buying into this understanding. For instance, Giraldo (2012) argues that the re-enchantment and subjectivation of nature prevents its over-exploitation via the techno-scientific administration of nature. Meanwhile, Jenkins (2015: 453) draws attention to the strategic value of ‘essentialising narratives’ in specific situations. Reporting on rural women’s activism against extractive industries in Ecuador and Peru, she found that their self-identification with *pachamama* helped them to bond with each other and hence to create a more coherent identity and narrative to support their struggle (Jenkins 2015). Indeed, as we will see in this PhD, to picture an external nature in the context of extreme confrontation with extractive industries appears politically useful.

Interestingly, some Andean indigenous conceptions of nature appear to speak about a *socially produced* nature. Thus for some writers, in the Andean *cosmovision*, humans

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<sup>8</sup> The analogy between women and Mother Nature is also criticised by feminists who see it as a threat to our sexual and reproductive rights (e.g. Da Silva 2015).



are an integral part of the scheme of life, which is constantly being reproduced and re-created by its various components in dynamic interaction: the human is raised together with “the livestock and the plants, the soils, the water and the weather” (Van Kessel and Salas 2002: 51, see also Reyes and Roig 2008). For humans, this process notably occurs through agriculture, and that is why agricultural production under the Andean *cosmovision* only involves taking what is necessary for the reproduction of life (Macas 2010, Farrah and Vasapollo 2011, Hidalgo-Capitán *et al.* 2014b). This thesis offers a detailed exploration of this aspect in both Chapters 6 and 7, where place-based indigenous perspectives and practices linked to the matter of territory are considered. Here, though, this chapter next considers more generally the question of territory and place-based politics as understood in the scholarly literature, and as part of the establishment of the theoretical framework of the PhD.

## 2.5 Territory

Territory is a key concept in both geography and political ecology; hence there is a large literature devoted to it (e.g. Taylor 1994, 1999, Vandergeest and Peluso 1995, 2015, Agnew 2009b, Asiyanbi 2015). According to Agnew (2009a), territory is “a unit of contiguous space that is used, organized and managed by a social group, individual person or institution to restrict and control access to people and places” (Agnew 2009a: 28). In a similar vein, Elden assures that the modern understanding of territory is two-fold. Conceptually, it is defined as a geographical space “bounded under the control of a group of people, fixed with boundaries, exclusive internal sovereignty and equal external status” (Elden 2013: 18) while, at the same time, territory is seen as “an outcome of territoriality” (Elden 2010: 757), a reductionist explanation, in his opinion. Hence, he calls for a different appreciation of territory whereby it is conceived as “social/spatial form of organization, one that is historically and geographically limited and dependent rather than a biological drive or a social need” (Elden 2013: 10). Conclusively, he defines territory as a *relation* between power and space in a given historical moment, a process, a set of practices or “a political technology or bundle of political technologies [and] techniques for measuring land and controlling terrain” (Elden 2013: 323). Here, political technologies include mapping and GIS, laws and norms, and institutions devoted to “establish the nation-state and its territory as self-evident, hegemonic and enduring” (Radcliffe 2009: 427; see also Asiyanbi 2015). In this thesis the role of mapping, norms and institutions that aim to produce the national territory is explored in depth when assessing the *Programa Socio Bosque* in Chapter 5.

Indeed, through historical investigation, Elden traces the origins and evolution of the concept of territory in Western thought until the emergence of the modern nation-state system, aiming to problematize the concept. Thus although for him the territory “is produced, mutable and fluid” (Elden 2010: 812), he centres the analysis in the state territory. Certainly, it is difficult to think about the contemporary world without national frontiers, dividing not only geographic space but also the imaginaries of the people living inside those borders (Agnew 2005). And yet, aside from this conventional ‘hard territoriality’, a ‘soft territoriality’ has also been elucidated to name those territories claimed or managed by non-state actors that challenge state-centric visions (Sack 1986, Bryant 2005).

The state, as it is being associated to territory, can be understood as a set of institutions that facilitate the control and exercise of sovereignty over a continuous territory (Taylor 1999, Agnew 2009a). State sovereignty itself is understood as a system of recognition by peers through which each state accepts the power that every state has over its own territory, while formally promising not to interfere in the other’s internal affairs; in the process, this form of spatial political organisation and mutual recognition has meant that the claims to territory of non-state actors (notably indigenous peoples) have been often brutally cast to one side (Hirst 2005, Silveira *et al.* 2017). At the same time, the state is also commonly seen to be a container of social relationships that permits it to exercise power in a territorial manner. Thus, for the British geographer Peter Taylor (1994, 1999), the modern state is focused on undertaking a number of key tasks: patrolling the borders, managing the economy, building a sense of national identity, providing social services and controlling the population. In doing that, the state makes itself the dominant power inside its territory. So as part of the analysis of state-linked green capitalism, it is important for this PhD to investigate and understand its state institutions and the instruments that allow the state to exercise power over a defined territory, namely maps and territorial planning. As such, the analysis in Chapter 5 will focus on the *Programa Socio Bosque*, the Ministry of Environment and the instruments deployed by the 2008 Constitution and the National Plan for Good Living (PNBV).

But the state is also seen as a ‘leaking container’ affected by diverse forces struggling to dismantle it: other states mounting attacks from the outside and sub-national groups challenging its authority from the inside. Scholars debate what this dynamic means for the state. For some, this process of continuous ‘leaking’ when combined with intensifying environmental crises that today span the globe, augurs the future demise of the state as a powerful actor (Taylor 1994). For others, state territory is still one of

the most effective forms of social control of modern times, in part because it is changing to embrace new non-state territories in a world of fluxes and networks (Agnew 2009a) where it has develop 'spatial selectivity' to promote its control (Lee 2015: 351).

This viewpoint also coincides with the idea that multiple territories can co-exist within a national territory, thereby acknowledging the different scales and complex multi-faceted dimensions that the phenomenon of territory can have in practice. Indeed, different groups regularly claim particular territories without pretensions of dismantling the national territory or demanding absolute exclusivity. Here is a 'soft territoriality' approach (Bryant 2005). And yet, this more fragmented appreciation of territory needs to be set against wider trends in global political economy; hence, for some writers, capitalism is seen as an homogenizing force that actually aims to reduce the multiple possibilities of territoriality over time into a single domineering one: the capitalist nation-state (e.g. Mançano Fernandes 2005, Lee 2015).

Still, the literature has certainly noted the plethora of non-state actors that interact in and across territory, thereby underscoring the diversity and fluidity of human relationships that criss cross state-imposed borders and ways of thinking about territory (Escobar 2008). And yet, writers acknowledge that it is a struggle for non-state actors to earn the sort of legitimacy that states are commonly seen to possess (Radcliffe 2009, Zimmerer 2015). Indigenous movements, for example, tend to root their struggles to a given territory while also challenging state power through novel forms of identity construction and political self-organization (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995, Li 2004, Escobar 2008). These days, many such actors transcend national boundaries via transnational networks that give them political support and even some power, and perhaps thereby a certain level of legitimacy (Andolina *et al.* 2009). Yet such initiatives do not obviate the need for a permanent process of negotiations with the state (Hirst 2005, Agnew 2009b, Erazo 2013). Moreover, even in a world of fluxes and global exchange, the state authority over a territory is still very important (Elden 2013).

In Latin American scholarship the concept has tended to receive more attention in sociology, anthropology and political science than in geography or political ecology, with the exception of Brazilian critical geography, as discussed below. Most of this writing has been heavily centred on the role of territory in the functioning of the nation-state (e.g. Laclau 1981, Manzanal *et al.* 2007). More recently, few political ecology scholarship has tackled the concept of 'territory' embodying local social and ecological conditions and the 'cultural beings' of indigenous or peasant communities which are

“re-valued and re-appropriated as areas for development” (Leff 2015: 48-49, see also Escobar 2008, Aliste and Stamm 2016).

Since its conceptualization, *territory* is a space of struggle between national and sub-national territorialities (Santos 2000, Mançano Fernandes 2005, Haesbaert 2007, 2011, Porto Gonçalves 2009). For example, Brazilian critical geography has reflected much on territory as a concept associated to land struggles. For these authors territory is widely understood as a produced space, the material expression of dialectical power relationships (Santos 2000, Haesbaert 2011, Porto-Gonçalves 2001). Which means, in short, that the territory is socially produced by opposing forces, namely different territorialities aiming to imprint themselves on the ground, usually state-led activities in their historical alliance with capital interests, and the forces that seek to resist this intervention in local affairs (Mançano Fernandes 2005, Hasbeaert 2011).

Such struggle will define particular territories, albeit in different ways. So, *how* is the territory produced and who commands such production? According to world-systems theory, capitalism expands over national territories replacing former relations of production with capitalist relations of production (Wallerstein 2001, dos Santos 2002). But capitalist expansion is uneven (Smith 2010); hence for the Brazilian critical geographers, the materialisation of social relations of power in the space occurs in waves of territorialisation, de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation. Every territorialisation implies the de-territorialisation of something else, in a process of expansion and contraction, reaction and reflux (Mançano Fernandes 2005, Hasbeaert 2011). That waving movement produces a multi-territory not necessarily determined *only* by state power; rather, multi-dimensional and multi-scalar actions of diverse groups produce the multi-territory. As such, the nation state territory in fact comprises diverse overlapping territorialities in tension with the state territoriality: different *intentionalities* trying to imprint themselves on the ground, to produce territory (Mançano Fernandes 2005, Haesbaert 2007).

In its green version, capitalism territorialises itself through producing ‘first nature’ for strict preservation, which might be later transformed into commodities – often tonnes of carbon ‘fixed’ by the ecosystem - to be traded in international markets (Lohmann 2014, Asiyanbi 2015). Capitalist territorialisation may imply the de-territorialisation of former owners and users of the territories in an ‘accumulation by dispossession’ fashion (Harvey 2004). Meanwhile, re-territorialisation processes may occur scattered all over a given territory through active struggles by former owners/users, or perhaps more ambiguously, by simply ignoring the prohibition to use resources in natural enclosures,

such as parks and protected areas. An awareness of such territorial dynamics will frame the analysis of the arrival of green capitalist strategies, like the *Programa Socio Bosque*, to indigenous territories, as a form of state territoriality, in Chapters 5 and 7 of this dissertation.

However, these kinds of assessments tend to obviate the heterogeneous character of indigenous territories and the power relationships occurring *inside* these sub-national territories. For example, in her study of an indigenous territory in Ecuador, Juliet Erazo shows how indigenous territorial sovereignty is continuously negotiated between leaders and residents but also with outsiders (like oil companies and environmentalists). Amidst such negotiating dynamics a 'territorial citizenship' has been forged, a set of rights and responsibilities that facilitate governing the territory while sits alongside the state's requirements for continuing to occupy their territory (Erazo 2013, see also Erazo 2015). Indeed, intra-territorial dynamics are of much interest to this PhD, and will be carefully considered when analysing the material deployments of the notions of *buen vivir*, the rights of nature or *pachamama* and territory in the Tola Chica community (Chapter 7).

In this regard, it is important to note that the scenario is not always *local* forms of living resisting the penetration of *global* capitalism in a territory, because many local practices are themselves capitalist in nature while some global forces can be emancipatory, as for example, the international feminist discourse. As Biersack and Greenberg assert, "capitalism no longer supervenes but intervenes engaging with the local accommodating and negotiating with it as a condition of its own penetration" (Biersack and Greenberg 2006: 16). The territory is thus either a "space of liberty or oppression, of expropriation or resistance" (Mançano Fernandes 2005: 4); it is dialectical in character (Santos 2000). Hence, to assume that all local places are 'good' and all global spaces are 'bad' reinforces an idealistic and misleading view of the local, in the same way that 'indigenous' or 'traditional' societies were idealised and misunderstood (Massey 2004, Mançano Fernandes 2005, Harris 2016). Indeed, a more complex understanding here is helpful in resisting state-linked capitalism. Thus, and by assuming local manifestations of capitalism provide precise geographical locations that can be reclaimed, it becomes apparent that there are real bodies on the ground that can be challenged and local political and economic authorities that can be defied. This helps to render capitalism less abstract and more 'human' – in turn, reinforcing the capacity of social movements to mount targeted challenges to the status quo (Massey 2004).

However, and notwithstanding the above discussion, from the perspective of many local communities “capitalist globalisation does indeed seem to arrive as a threatening external force” (Massey 2004: 12). This is evinced in the proliferation of conflicts involving local people and big development projects such as oil and mining extraction, or the construction of dams or roads, all that have a tendency to displace local populations in their way; more recently, it is to be seen in projects related to global discourses on nature conservation and climate change that promote such things as ecosystem services, carbon trading and biodiversity preservation, once again usually at the expense of dislocated residents (Bryant 2000, Asiyanbi 2016). It is not surprising, therefore, that the literature on struggles for social and environmental justice in the global South tend to highlight the importance of *place* to the articulation and defence of *territory*, notably through active resistance to particular global threats and/or the construction of economic, cultural and political alternatives (Escobar 2008, Middleton 2015). ‘Popular ecologism’, for instance, depicted as an ecologism of the livelihoods (Bebbington and Humphreys-Bebbington 2009) follows this trend.

Place, according to geographers such as John Agnew (1987), is important in people's lives because it grounds their lives and perceptions to a particular geographic location, a locale bonded to specific socioeconomic and political processes, and one that is a generator of often quite intense feelings of attachment and belonging (see also Middleton 2015). It is in this sense that place-based societies involved in socio-environmental conflicts must be understood: as those whose struggles seek to produce territories in which to reproduce their lives according to their own worldviews (Mançano Fernandes 2005, Escobar 2001, 2008); this is illustrated in this thesis via the Tola Chica community case study in Chapter 7. Indeed, such is the potency of place to political struggles nowadays that even some relatively new urban communities are *identifying* themselves as socio-territorial movements embedded in place (Li 2004). Such a strategy affords a movement apparent social legitimacy, affirms their preeminent claims to a terrain that they know inside out, and helps them to construct wider political alternatives that some writers label ‘liberation ecologies’ (Peet and Watts 2004) or territorially based resistance (Leff 2015).

Indeed, the strength of socio-territorial struggles dwells in the diversity of identities that people attach to place, as distinctive cultural politics thereby inform the local (Escobar 2001, Massey 2004, Middleton 2015). But those are “revised identities”, which “are a partial product of longer histories and experiences” that provide local people of agency and ability to negotiate and interact with ‘the global’ (Hope 2017: 77, see also Himley 2009). Hence, through a process of *emplacement*, environmental movements

territorialise or (re)territorialise their struggles but could also undergo a process of self-identification as 'ecologists of the south' in contrast to the 'environmentalists of the north' (who focus often on park creation and similar conservation projects). Hence, to become an 'ecologist of the south' implies an act of identity construction through self-recognition *and* emplacement (Escobar 2001, 2007, Martínez-Alier 2002). Such collective identity is, therefore, a powerful vehicle *for* political action that at the same time is constructed *through* political action, when social movements confront capitalism from and within their particular territories. Hence, for these movements, positioning themselves in a territory is part of the process of self-identification, of *becoming* and *being* a particular social movement (Touraine 1981, Melucci 1994, Li 2004). This last appreciation will be taken into full consideration when analysing critical ecologism in Chapter 6.

The struggle for a particular territory tends to occur in a highly self-conscious manner linked to wider trends and calculations, as appeals to identity can be strategically resonant, after all (Jenkins 2015). For example, in one case described by Li (2004), a campaign against the construction of a dam was framed in terms of the local group's ethnic identity and their territory as a cultural asset rather than as a resource (i.e. so much agricultural land would be lost) because this was seen to be a more pertinent route by allied environmental activists. Thus, such a strategy permitted the activists' line of argument to chime well with an international indigenous discourse that helped to secure alliances as well as media coverage; it also gave them a stronger argument against compulsory reallocation insofar as ethnic identity was seen to be inextricably attached to a particular location (Li 2004). Since the term 'place' is central to indigenous politics, Middleton (2015) calls for a political ecology that considers "indigenous cosmologies on the one hand, and resource-based political economy on the other" (Middleton 2015: 562). This is certainly a way by which to analyse current struggles of indigenous people in Latin America where ancestral linkages to territories and unique in situ ways of life similarly come into play in order to produce territory dialectically with the state. As we shall see in this thesis, notions such as *buen vivir* and *pachamama* provide strong elements of place-based ethnic identity for such production.

Meanwhile, and although the main force in producing territory in dialectical tension with local residents is the state (Mançano Fernandes 2005, Haesbaert 2011), the role of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) is not to be gainsaid either, whether through their role as supporters of struggles against green capitalism or, conversely, in some cases, as local agents of practices and discourses of nature preservation that may

affirm green capitalist projects. The role of NGOs in social struggles is often thus far from straightforward (Bryant 2005). As scholars note, to some extent NGOs have been an alternative to other forms of social organisation, attracting people (many in the middle classes) with social concerns that will no longer militate to a leftist party or a grassroots social movement (Escobar 1995). Further complexity derives from the fact that many of them depend on elite financial supporters who are often firmly based in the pro-development camp. Such complexity will also be seen in this PhD: some of the anti-green capitalist mobilisation includes social organisations and critical ecology NGOs, whereas green capitalist programs are often lead by mainstream environmental NGOs working notably in association with the state. The decision-making here can be equally complex, depending on such things as negotiations with corporate as well as state donors, local populations and international agencies, and even calculations as to the reputational (or 'moral capital') implications of a given alliance or action (Bryant 2005). In the process, NGOs, too, tend to be drawn into the contested production of territory alongside a diversity of other local and non-local actors (see Chapter 6).

In short, the question of territory and an allied sense of place are fundamental to any well-rounded understanding of capitalist interventions (be they green or otherwise) and the possible resistance to them (Escobar 2008). As such, the present research seeks to understand how social movements and other actors converge in producing particular territories in Ecuador under the discourse and practices of *buen vivir* and *pachamama* to promote or confront green capitalism.

## 2.6 Summary

This chapter has set out the theoretical framework of the PhD via a selective assessment of relevant literature drawn mainly from political ecology and geography. The Chapter began by carrying out a wide review of political ecology literature and its different strands, including the assessment of a growing Latin American political ecology that often reflects a decoloniality approach to describe ecological changes occurring in the region and the unequal power relationships thereto. The Chapter then assessed the scholarly works on environmentalism in connection with how humans relate to nature, showing that authors are in general agreement that political activity tends to follow a pattern of 'technocratic environmentalism', 'ecocentrism' or 'popular ecologism'. Next, the wider political economy approach was considered, specifically, how modern capitalism and the market seek to subsume socationatures and environmentalism through the promotion of a 'green' capitalism which is strongly linked to the paradigm of sustainable development. Consideration was given



as to how the notion of *buen vivir* has been presented as an alternative to the overarching concept of sustainable development, followed by an assessment as to how this same concept has been analysed in the literature in relation to green capitalism. The contested concept of nature was then addressed, arguing that the different forms by which humans relate to nature influences the kind of environmentalism they will perform. Such a reflection included the assessment of the notion of the rights of nature or *pachamama* in the Ecuadorian context. A final aspect to the theoretical framework concerned the matter of territory and how this leading concept in geography is often closely allied to the issue of place in the literature. Indeed, while a bone of contention between state and non-state actors, it was nonetheless seen to be a key element in how scholars have come to understand the articulation of contemporary social protest in countries such as Ecuador where 'indigenous' ethnic labels often go hand-in-hand with assertions of 'ancestral' territory. How far such a coalition of labels and actors is able via the assertion of claims to territory to confront a surging and increasingly self-confident green capitalism remains to be seen, and it is a major concern of the empirical chapters of this study (Chapters 5 to 7). The following chapter sets out the qualitative methodology that has been used in this PhD.

## Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter discusses the qualitative methodology used in this PhD to explore how diverse actors involved in Ecuadorian environmentalism use ideas about *buen vivir*, the rights of nature or *pachamama* and territory in their activities, how far the deployed notions actually pose a challenge to the ethos of green capitalism, and whether or not they contribute to building alternatives to it. It firstly explains why such a methodology was chosen, as well as considering related issues of validity, reliability, ethics and positionality. The chapter then discusses the research design of a single case with three embedded sub-cases and the rationale for such an arrangement in terms of the scope of the research and of my positionality. The chapter then considers the methods and techniques used for data collection and analysis. Special attention is paid to the positive and negative outcomes of the methodological choices made, notably the problems that were encountered during fieldwork and the strategies used to overcome them. Finally, the methods of analysis are described.

### 3.1 Qualitative methodology: positionality, reliability, validity, ethics

This thesis has used a qualitative methodology that uses ethnographic and case study approaches. This combination allowed me to study the various key actors of Ecuadorian environmentalism in depth while being able to situate them in a wider context (Atkinson and Hammersley 1995, Yin 2009, Creswell 2013; see also below). In turn, qualitative methodology has proved to have a highly explanatory potential for complex social dynamics in a “real world setting” (Patton 2002: 39) such as the ones that this PhD investigates and that cannot be analysed through quantitative methods (Doolittle 2015). Certainly, the process of qualitative enquiry “captures the richness of context-dependent sites and situations” (Baxter and Eyles 1997: 505), as it emphasizes words, events and attitudes which could not be learned using quantitative methods (Bryman 2012, Cloke *et al.* 2004); indeed, the latter seek “causal determination, prediction, and generalization of findings” whereas “qualitative research seeks instead illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations” (Golafshani 2003: 600). To understand the dynamics of social organizations (e.g. environmental and indigenous organizations, indigenous communities) and the complex decision-making processes within them requires an analysis of unquantifiable social relations. Another advantage of using a qualitative methodology is that it allows the researcher to “see through the eyes of the people being studied” (Bryman 2012: 379), something that corresponds well with the ethnographic approach that this research has undertaken (see below) and to my positionality as a researcher.

Anglo-American political ecologists have reflected on positionality both in relation to its political usefulness and critical engagement of their critique. For example, Bakker (2010) asserts that using a political ecology theoretical framework “is an explicit attempt to situate the positionality of [her] critique” (Bakker 2010: 729). Indeed, for political ecologists the critical spirit and empiricism of the discipline represents a clear positionality in the sense that it does not accept “orthodox explanations from the physical sciences” (Forsyth 2008: 757).

In consequence, there is also an effort to design methodologies that are themselves critical (Watts 1997). But conducting ethnographic research reflecting on my positionality was taken further by assuming that I am an urban, middle-class, highly educated woman, and sympathetic of ecological struggles but with a critical approach to them. Against that background, I opted to conduct reflective research as it is sometimes understood in Latin America, in the sense of studying one's own group but also conducting “our own research for our own goals”, which is progressively being considered a decolonial methodology (Cajigas-Rotundo 2007: 188). I was also interested in highlighting the epistemic importance of the scholar's engagement with social reality as a form of positionality that might be as equally important as the ‘scientific objectivity’ given by distancing oneself from it (Mejía 2008, Suárez-Krabbe 2011, Burke and Shear 2014).

So in keeping with the above considerations, this PhD explores the thinking and actions of different actors of Ecuadorian environmentalism, aiming to conduct a politically engaged and socially useful research (Bryant and Bailey 1997, Blaikie 2012, Griffiths 2014). As such, I maintained my ethical academic commitment to make a useful contribution to the current discussion of those involved in ecological struggles in Ecuador while I hoped also to provide some constructive support to the Tola Chica community's engagement with ecological projects and the defence of their territory in general too. In this regard, the topic and research questions chosen, the selection of a qualitative perspective of analysis and ethnographic and case study methodological approaches; gathering the main data through in-depth interviews and participant observation and using other sources of data to complement, triangulate, contextualize and problematize; spending one year carrying out fieldwork; making myself and my investigation useful for those being investigated hence not conducting ‘extractive research’ (de Sousa Santos 2010), were all part of my positionality. I considered, too, that an approach that favours “methodological pluralism” (Doolittle 2015) was the most appropriate for capturing the density and richness of social relations and for understanding the viewpoints of environmentalists in Ecuador.

Nonetheless, some concerns are habitually expressed about using qualitative methodology, especially since the rise of quantitative methods in the social sciences in modern times, which has purportedly reduced qualitative practices to the status of a purely 'descriptive' methodology, useful 'only' for the exploratory phase of a research project (St. Martin and Pavloskaya 2009). Concerns raised here notably relate to how a qualitative methodology can affirm the validity of its findings, since the latter amount to 'opinions' or 'points of view' on social reality (Creswell 2013). Moreover, critics wonder how qualitative research can be replicated to verify those findings, a typical procedure of the natural sciences and the so-called 'strong' social sciences (such as economics). Mindful of this, the parameters of validity and reliability were thus carefully considered in designing the research, when applying the data collection methods, and in subsequent analysis of the data for this thesis.

The literature highlights that validity is related to the internal coherence of the data that will permit a researcher to make theoretical generalizations on the social phenomenon under scrutiny (Bryman 2012). In this regard, qualitative methodology is criticized for being 'anecdotal' and for making generalizations out of particularities, for example, from a single opinion of an interviewee (Silverman 2011). This is especially mentioned in criticism of the case study approach (see below). This issue was indeed addressed during fieldwork using a combination of methods and appropriate data collection that permitted cross-referencing and triangulation (St. Martin and Pavloskaya 2009, Doolittle 2015). In other words, the validity of the data gathered was assured through making an extensive use of diverse sources of data: participant observation, interviews (unstructured and semi-structured, individual and group), published and unpublished texts, cartography and audio-visual materials. The information gathered was thereafter analysed and contrasted to find a fixed point of information around which all the sources converge, finding patterns and permanencies (Silverman 2011).

These exercises of triangulation and crosschecking were conducted across types of methods as well as in relation to different actors. For instance, individual interviews in Tola Chica community were crosschecked with group interviews and documents; direct observations in NGO meetings were contrasted with individual interviews and documents; governmental officers interviews were verified with public declarations and documents. In turn, what community leaders said was crosschecked with the views of other community members; similarly, state officials' testimonies were crosschecked with those of NGO or indigenous organization activists and researchers (and vice versa).

As for the ethnographic fieldwork, through which as a researcher I gradually became 'a native' (see below), data validity was affirmed by a strategy of deliberately distancing myself from the group from time to time, even as I presented the collected data and my interpretations of it to colleagues (such as other scholars working on similar issues) in order to obtain an outsider perspective (Haenfler 2004), or to have possible misinterpretations or omissions pointed out to me (Baxter and Eyles 1997). A central attitude during ethnography is "to continually interrogate one's own positionality" and to remain open-minded to the causes at play when interpreting what is being seen (Philo 2009: 220). The thesis also assured validity by constructing an adequate theoretical framework linked to the empirical research (see Chapter 2), which thereby made it possible for me to state a path for analytic generalization (Yin 2009).

In turn, scholars note that reliability refers to the possibility of replication of the study related to the stability, consistency and predictability of the data (Baxter and Eyles 1997). However, in social research, it appears quite impossible to expect absolute replication of data, as the 'social reality' inevitably changes (Golafshani 2003). Moreover, in qualitative research, reliability is a consequence of validity (Patton 2002), so careful research design and rigorous data registering is recommended to improve both (Baxter and Eyles 1997). For this PhD, I registered the data thoroughly in a fieldwork diary where the time, location and observations of each interview and each event that I attended (e.g. community's assemblies and social gatherings, environmentalists' meetings and direct actions, governmental officers' public presentations) were recorded and linked afterwards to any audio-visual material available (e.g. photographs, tape-recordings used with the participant's approval). Each register was adequately codified for confidentiality purposes and was available whenever required for re-analysis, while yet following the ethics approval regime specified by King's College London (Silverman 2011; see below). Reliability was also assured by registering clearly and in detail the design of the case study (see below), namely the criteria used to select the sub-cases, giving enough details for further comparison, if needed (Miles and Huberman 1994).

There are also important issues to consider regarding the ethics of qualitative research<sup>9</sup>. For Lipson (1994), there are four dimensions to be considered in this regard: informed consent, avoiding deception, confidentiality of participants and their data, and benefits versus risks of the research for participants. Obtaining informed consent from

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<sup>9</sup> Ethical approval from King's College London was granted on 6th November 2012 and lasted until 5th November 2014 (REP(GSSHM)/11/12-4) which fully covered the fieldwork phase of the PhD.

the participants is a basic research procedure, which requires sufficient information to be provided to the participants before starting the data gathering. The purpose of the study, my intentions as a researcher, and the destiny of the data were clearly communicated individually when conducting interviews and participant observation with environmental organizations and government officers (Wolcott 2008). In turn, before conducting research in the Tola Chica community, I obtained authorization from the community's Assembly, after presenting a written petition that annexed a short-version of the research proposal, and attending an Assembly's meeting to verbally explain my objectives. The following topics were discussed with all the participants: central purpose of the study, possible associated risks, expected benefits, and confidentiality issues. Participants were granted the right to anonymity, to withdraw from the research at any time, and to take their data with them if so desired (Creswell 2013).

To avoid deception I identified myself along with the purpose of the study with all the participants. Due to the nature of the research, there was no reason to conduct 'covert' research or to disguise information in order to gain data, so open discussion and candour were the basis of every encounter between researcher and participants (Wolcott 2008). However, the information shared with critical ecologists, government officers and workers of mainstream NGOs was different regarding my critical approach to green capitalism, without this meaning partaking in deception (Creswell 2013).

Confidentiality of interviewees was assured by assigning aliases to individuals when labelling recordings from interviews, transcribing the interviews, and writing up the dissertation. Interviewees' personal data was not shared with anybody else (Israel and Hay 2006). During the analysis and writing up phases, the individual information served to construct arguments and descriptions of the case, without identifying any interviewee, thus assuring the anonymity of personal information. In some cases when a participant shared some material "off the record", the precise information was used only if its dissemination did not harm any individual, and was kept anonymous (Creswell 2013). Interviewees are listed in Appendix B. Exceptions were made with public speeches of some participants, whose complete name and job position were noted. This is a fact recognised by the British Sociological Association (Israel and Hay 2006: 79) and was considered in such cases, for example with some indigenous leaders. Those participants are listed in the bibliography. At all times, information was, and continues to be, handled with care under the premise of avoiding harm to any individual.

Important ethical issues for this research included ascertaining the views of critical ecologists on the expected benefits for their struggles that could emerge from the research and to willingly offer to carry out volunteer work for the Tola Chica community. Concerning the latter, in exchange for the community's authorization to conduct my research, I agreed to volunteer in the plant nursery and to help with the community's new territorial planning (see Chapter 7 for more details). As mentioned above, the personal engagement with Tola Chica is part of my positionality as a researcher, which in itself was coherent with my long-term academic commitment to contribute to the critical ecologist movement in Ecuador.

I am conscious that this outspoken commitment to Ecuadorian ecological struggles has its upsides and downsides for this research project. On the one hand, my former collaboration with critical ecologists' NGOs and grassroots environmental groups provided me with the necessary contacts and a network of trust among critical ecologists that were of great support during fieldwork. But also, due to my previous work experience in mainstream environmental NGOs and my undergraduate degree in Biology, I have many former classmates working for both mainstream NGOs and government environmental agencies, including in the Ministry of Environment. This mixed set of connections helped me to maintain a critical view and to track all the perspectives and dimensions of my topic. Indeed, despite my commitment to the outlook of critical ecologists that seek to defy green capitalism, I nevertheless maintained a critical approach to them as depicted in Chapter 6. For that, I intentionally distanced myself from each group from time to time, consulting other scholars working on the same topic, exposing data and interpretations to them so that they could draw attention to any possible misconception, questioning the findings and/or my own associated perceptions, as well as testing alternative explanations (Davenport and Anderson 2005). Similarly, my interest in studying Tola Chica community's forest conservation experience emerged from my previous collaboration with some members of that community. This previous engagement allowed the research to achieve methodological richness and permitted me to be aware of the power relationships inside the community; elements that would be difficult to see without the trusting relationships I had previously built up as well as the new ones that I developed during the fieldwork for this PhD.

### **3.2 Research approaches: ethnography and case study**

The research conducted for this thesis used a combination of case study and ethnographic approaches. In doing that, I aimed to capture complex social processes

while making connections with a broader context. The specificities of the research design are discussed in the next section, while here the strengths and disadvantages of the chosen approaches are explained.

### **3.2.1 Ethnographic approach**

The ethnographic approach notably implies that the researcher is submerged in the social reality under study to observe and participate as ‘an insider’ (St. Martin and Pavlovskaya, 2009), by generating “the delicate balance between local insider and outsider perspectives and ‘near-native competence’” (Núñez 2015: 460). Ethnography is used to study a closed, culture-sharing group (Creswell 2013) and so it was used to study the various key actors of non-state Ecuadorian environmentalism as well as the Tola Chica community. While members of the latter indeed form a clearly identifiable group, the situation was somewhat more complex with regard to the non-state environmentalists, albeit even here there is a tendency to form a close-knit group during public and private gatherings around topics of shared interest. In any case, the ethnographic approach was adopted due to its potentialities to come as close as possible to understanding the social construction of concepts, beliefs and behaviours that the relevant actors reveal towards the main topics under research, namely, how ideas of nature, *buen vivir* and territory are deployed by diverse actors, as well as how far these notions can or do underpin resistance to the advance of green capitalism in the country. For example, this research assumes that the way people think about nature is the way people experience nature (Davenport and Anderson 2005), which in turn is shaped by personal practices in a particular place (Escobar 2001, 2008) but also by the socio-political and historical context of the group (Smith 2010). Through ethnographic work the experiences, practices and contexts of a given group are revealed, since the ethnographer, as an insider, acquires at least some kind of sensitivity towards the group (Atkinson and Hammersley 1995).

In particular, the study of the practices and strategies that may challenge green capitalism was facilitated by ethnographic work. It thus permitted me to record not only what people say and do, but also the tension between what they intend to do and what they finally do (for instance, grassroots environmentalists that say they reject green capitalism, while demanding that sustainable development projects be implemented in society), as well as the prevalence of the unspoken: what people do not say (Creswell 2013). In addition, this research study is interested in the social agreements that have led to the adoption of certain concepts and practices – something that is better to observe rather than simply to ask about (Doolittle 2015). For instance, this was



particularly helpful in understanding the uneven adoption of environmentalist ideas by Tola Chica residents. Moreover, such processes of negotiation and dissent need to be observed in the context where they occurred and with the 'insider gaze' that an ethnographic approach provides (Davenport and Anderson 2005).

Another strength of ethnography is its descriptive capacity achieved through extended and detailed observational, reflective and analytical work (Bryman 2012) that produces 'rich thick descriptions' (Núñez 2015: 460). Therefore, to conduct ethnography requires time, as the researcher is submerged in the social reality under analysis and becomes part of it. In that sense, ethnographic findings are not extracts of reality, but "intersubjective truths" that result from the interaction (Cloke *et al.* 2004: 170). Indeed, during fieldwork I constructed relationships and revitalized old acquaintances while affirmed my positionality of conducting a politically engaged research (Griffiths 2014, Rocheleau 2015). At the same time, participating in group activities (e.g. community Assemblies, environmentalists gatherings), sharing the participants' experiences helped me "to put the whole situation into perspective" (Fetterman 2009: 94) and made it easier to understand and interpret the participant's perceptions and motivations. The interaction mode contributed also to building the confidence of the participants, enabling them to become familiar with the topics under scrutiny, so that they can later use the information gathered fruitfully (i.e. the analysis of 'territory', see Chapter 7).

In this regard, two aspects were kept in mind while doing ethnographic work. Firstly, that my point of view as a researcher invariably influences data gathering and interpretation, a fact that can affect validity. Nevertheless, this should not be seen as a problem, since even 'scientific' experiments are influenced by the observer (Yin 2009). Indeed, my personal, academic and professional history, the matrix of knowledge I belong to, and my values and beliefs, influenced what I saw and how it was then interpreted (Bryman 2012). Secondly, as a researcher, I influenced the social world while observing it because I became part of it, through the 'simple' act of being in a community or a group asking questions about – sometimes uncomfortable - issues that may alter the existing order (Cloke *et al.* 2004). Nevertheless, the multi-faceted character of the ethnographic approach is its strength, as it makes it possible to construct knowledge relationally, engaging with the participants. Indeed, ethnography considers participants as socially and politically situated agents in possession of knowledge that contributes to enhancing the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon under analysis (Cloke *et al.* 2004). The construction of knowledge in a relational way permitted me to avoid conducting research as an 'extractive process'

while working with subaltern and habitually silenced sorts of knowledge (de Sousa Santos 2010).

### **3.2.2 Case study approach**

This research adopted a case study approach of Ecuadorian environmentalism with three embedded sub-cases. The research design is carefully explained in section 3.3, while in what follows the benefits and downsides of such an approach are assessed.

The case study approach permitted me to assess complex social phenomena within a real-life context (Yin 2009). This is because, unlike social experiments and surveys that deliberately disentangle the phenomenon from its context, the case study approach seeks to analyse real and contemporary events and behaviours for which the contextual relations are determinant (Cloke *et al.* 2004). Indeed, the engagement of state environmentalism with ‘payment for conservation’ mechanisms (i.e. green capitalism strategies) and the creative responses to green capitalism that critical ecologists and Tola Chica’s community members conceive are analysed within the context of Ecuadorian environmentalism, the country’s particular ecological history and current public debates about *buen vivir*, the rights of nature or *pachamama* and territory. Such a task involves examining the social construction and appropriation of these ideas, competing perceptions about them (for example ‘nature’), and the practices that participants think ought to accompany the notions (Davenport and Anderson 2005).

True, and as with the qualitative methodology in general as noted above, concerns are raised about the theoretical and methodological appropriateness of the qualitatively-based case study if compared with other (quantitative) methodologies. Issues like the difficulties of replication and a high risk of bias due to the (still) absence of universal methods are frequently mentioned (Yin 2009; see Doolittle 2015 who makes the case for methodological pluralism). The case study approach, particularly, generates doubts about the possibilities for theoretical generalisation from a single case (Yin 2009). Indeed, as Bakker states, the case study approach permits a researcher to define “actually-existing” social processes to analyse, but there are some serious constraints for “articulating local cases with translocal [...] processes” (Bakker 2010: 720-721). However, scholars respond that the aim of the case study approach is not theoretical generalization, but in-depth understanding (Creswell 2013). As such, the concerns just noted can be and were tackled in the context of this PhD by constructing a strong main case study, with embedded sub-cases (see also below), that relies on an adequate theoretical background (see Chapter 2), to facilitate analytic generalization (Yin 2009).

Indeed, the case study offers the flexibility to work with many kinds of sources of evidence and methods of data gathering – a fact that was fully taken advantage of in this thesis. As Doolittle rightly states, “methodological pluralism is critical to the growth of the political ecology community, ensuring that researchers eschew disciplinary-bound thinking in favour of a free choice as to which methods are most appropriate to the research questions at hand” being highly recommended when “working in diverse research settings and academic cultures” (Doolittle 2015: 515).

Thus, the case was designed to conduct research in relation to key actors and activities broadly grouped around three key foci: state-related environmental activity, non-governmental environmental actions, and local community-based ecologism. Indeed, among some political ecologists, the case study approach is used for it permits the researchers to conduct their investigations “in a context of nested and overlapping organizational and social movement networks rather than one centred on a single, one-dimensional hierarchical structure, even as it embraced a multitude of actors involved in many kinds and degrees of connection” (Rocheleau 2015: 83). Thus by using this approach I was able to consider a variety of actors and their perception of the issues being investigated (Doolittle 2015): governmental officers, national networks of environmentalists, non-governmental organizations, individual activists, critical scholars, political groups, grassroots organisations and one place-based entity (i.e. Tola Chica community); that is, a diversity of sources that converged in a triangulating way to attain validity (Bryman 2012).

There is sometimes a tendency also to assume that a multi-case study design assures validity (Creswell 2013). Nonetheless, Wolcott (2008) argues that one researcher can afford to devote maximum attention to one case with great attention to detail, without thereby risking the conduct of a superficial analysis. Thus, and following Yin (2012), a single case study with embedded sub-cases was chosen to deal with the many kinds of data and sources that were involved, which helped to attain research validity since the variety of sources could be contrasted and compared (Creswell 2013). This research design is discussed next.

### **3.3 Research design**

This PhD’s main purpose was to understand how far and in what ways actors involved in Ecuadorian environmentalism draw upon notions of *buen vivir*, the rights of nature or *pachamama* and territory in their activities, as well as to assess whether such action serves to help or to hinder the construction of alternatives to green capitalism in Ecuador. For that, I constructed a case study of Ecuadorian environmentalism with

three embedded sub-cases. The research design is carefully explained below while next it is discussed why Ecuador was chosen to conduct the empirical part of this thesis.

Ecuador was selected for conducting this research for a number of reasons. Firstly, the inclusion in the Ecuadorian Constitution of the notions of *buen vivir* and the rights of nature has brought to the fore debate about the notion of 'development' there (Acosta and Martínez 2009, Radcliffe 2012, Lang and Mokrani 2013), with critical scholars considering *buen vivir* in particular as an opportunity to construct a post-development, decolonial and anti-capitalist future through, among other issues, rethinking the relationship between humans and nature (Escobar 2010, Gudynas 2013, 2016 Zimmerer 2015). In turn, *pachamama* appears to some writers at least to be a subaltern version of nature that continues to be problematic due to an apparent misunderstanding of indigenous knowledge (Sánchez-Parga 2011), whereas to others the rights of nature are seen to be a triumph of the environmental movement (Gudynas 2009). Within this debate, the potential of both ideas to challenge green capitalism and to constitute an alternative environmental politics is a key concern for this PhD.

Secondly, the country follows international trends of environmental governance which has landed as manifestations of a green capitalism as it is being promoted around the world. Indeed, a number of mainstream environmental mechanisms and strategies, including Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES), Reduction of Emissions for Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) and the *Programa Socio Bosque* have been developed (Hall 2011, Krause and Loft 2013, Bravo and Moreano 2015) thereby providing an appropriate context in which to assess the battle of ideas that is a major focus in this study.

Thirdly, the existence of both novel notions (and their combination) and the growing prevalence of green capitalist interventions are complemented by the existence of a vibrant sector opposing such interventions in the country. Thus, Ecuadorian critical ecologists and indigenous organizations – including the largest national organization CONAIE - have already criticized and rejected the mechanisms of green capitalism because they consider that such mechanisms pose a serious threat to indigenous territories via a 'commodification of nature' that bodes ill for indigenous ways of life (CONAIE 2009, 2011, Ecological Action 2010, 2012a).

As such, the Ecuadorian case notably allowed me to analyse the social responses of critical ecologists, as well as those of the allied indigenous organizations, to green capitalist projects, in a context of conceptual innovation that is forcing the country to

place the relationship between humans and nature at the centre of the political debate. The research design thus sought to support the complexity of the Ecuadorian case, where various units (people, organizations, sites, projects) could be researched to explain the whole situation (Yin 2009).

I constructed and adapted the case study as the fieldwork progressed, keeping uppermost the objective of conducting a reflective, non-extractive, politically engaged and socially useful research (de Sousa Santos 2010, Griffiths 2014, Rocheleau 2015). The result was a case study of 'Ecuadorian environmentalism' with three embedded sub-cases: state-linked environmentalism, non-governmental environmental action and community-based ecologism. By way of looking how each set of actors understand and deploy the ideas of *buen vivir*, the rights of nature or *pachamama* and territory to assert their particular environmentalism, I aim to analyse state/civil society relations and contested discourses and materialities, both areas of key interest in political ecology (e.g. Bebbington 2000, Bryant 2005, Latorre-Tomás 2010, Molina 2012, Jenkins 2015).

I am aware that this assessment is far from complete; not included are organizations and actors outside the networks I chose (i.e. private actors, scientists) and other spheres of the state (i.e. local governments). But the case had to be 'bounded' somehow within a reasonable scale, so I decided to adopt the PSB as the 'binding feature' for the reasons detailed in section 3.3.2. The PSB, as a government forestry program framed the main thesis topic to forests while discussions with interviewees surrounding *buen vivir*, nature and territory provided me with a wider insight into environmental issues: we were talking about environmental thought with people that worked in forestry. Moreover, due to the environmental history of the country and its insertion in the global economy (see Chapter 4), the topic of the extractive industry and its negative effects on people and the environment was often raised in conversations (something that is reflected in Chapter 6). Also, a critical analysis of the 2008 Constitution and the National Plan for Good Living (PNBV) – which frame the PSB – similarly provided me with a wider appreciation of the environmental rationale of the Ecuadorian state (see more on this in Chapter 5). Finally, although the main focus was on the forestry aspects in Tola Chica community, discussions with *comuneros* concerning nature, agro-ecology, sustainable housing and community life enabled me to wide the scope of the research and carry out an assessment of the political ecology of environmentalism.

The three fold research foci and actors were selected in keeping with the standards and ethics of my positionality and wish to conduct reflective research and to put the

data at the service of those being investigated. So, if different actors had been chosen (i.e. private sector engaged in green business or scientists) the outcome would have been different from my academic commitment to work with the people involved in ecological struggles. Still, some of my interviewees from environmental NGOs are conservation scientists (in the sense that they themselves conduct research on nature conservation), so it would have been difficult to draw a line between ‘environmentalist’ and ‘scientist’ (Forsyth 2003). Nevertheless, I did not consider ‘Ecuadorian conservation scientists’ as a differentiated group because they seldom engage with ecological struggles and social mobilization as a community<sup>10</sup>, which is of great interest for this research. On the side of the private sector, at the time I conducted fieldwork for this PhD private companies were still unsuccessful in embracing the green capitalist rationale or developing green alternatives for capital accumulation. In fact, the first national norm that mandates the ‘greening’ of the private sector was issued only in 2012<sup>11</sup>.

With those clarifications, in what follows I narrate the process that I carried out to construct the case, including the three embedded sub-cases. In this section I briefly mention some of the methods applied in the research, which are explained in more detail in section 3.4. The following sections further explain why the various actors were chosen within each research foci.

### **3.3.1 Case study construction and rationale**

The research design was influenced by my long-term academic commitment in carrying out research that assists people involved in ecological struggles. As mentioned above, the case study was refined during the course of the fieldwork, visiting and revisiting different possibilities before settling on the subjects of investigation and the case study design. The first decision was to organize the research around the dialectical opposition between non-government environmental actors (in particular, the critical ecologists) and the state. In doing so I looked for combining ‘critique and solution’ as some political ecologist have pointed out (Robbins 2012), to be precise that “political ecology ought to serve both as a critique (by revealing deficiencies in dominant approaches to the environment), and as a solution (by specifying equitable and sustainable alternatives and solutions)” (Lee 2015: 190). In this way I aimed to

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<sup>10</sup> One exception was the “Scientists Concerned for Yasuni National Park”, a group of mainly Ecuadorian and United States-based biologists who had worked in the Yasuni area and in 2004 prepared a comprehensive report for the Ecuadorian president about the Park’s biodiversity and the prospective impacts of future oil extraction. The report was cited widely in documents to confront oil extraction in the Park (Andrade 2007, Bravo 2007). The original report can be accessed here: <http://www.saveamericasforests.org/Yasuni/Science/SciConcrndfrYasuni.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> A Ministerial Agreement of the Ministry of Environment that provides incentives to the private sector to import and use renewable energies and other clean technologies that reduce greenhouse gases emissions (MA #027, 20/Mar/2012).

understand how non-governmental environmentalists were using the ideas under scrutiny to oppose the manifestations of a green capitalism in Ecuador and to configure a political alternative. For that, I had to clarify some issues.

Firstly, I had to define who were the environmentalists in Ecuador who were using the ideas of *buen vivir* and the rights of nature or *pachamama* in their everyday practice, both in the state and non-state spheres (Research Question 1). Secondly, to assess who were the environmentalists promoting green capitalism; and thirdly, to delimit the actors contesting and advancing an alternative environmental politics to green capitalism, and how they were attempting to achieve this (Research Questions 2 and 3). Since I was also interested in the everyday material practices that give rise to alternative environmental politics, I was ready and fully committed to carrying out research relating to an indigenous community, (also Research Questions 2 and 3). I considered that conducting part of the research in an indigenous community would be instructive due to the fact that the key notions at the core of this research were assumed to be indigenous in origin by many scholars (Acosta and Martínez 2009, Macas 2010, Hidalgo-Capitán *et.al.* 2014a). As we shall see as the narrative of the thesis unfolds, working with critical ecologists and their indigenous allies together with my work in an indigenous community, led me to consider the concept of territory.

Those clarifications arrived as I conducted the fieldwork in Ecuador between November 2012 and November 2013. In keeping with the research questions (RQ), I conducted some exploratory interviews in Quito with NGO environmentalists and critical ecologists, attended public meetings, rallies and marches, during which I carried out unstructured interviews (see section 3.4.1). The objective was to establish who among the state and non-state environmentalists applied the ideas of *buen vivir* and the rights of nature or *pachamama* to their activities. Additionally, I reviewed documents from the Ministry of Environment, the National Secretariat of Planning and Development (SENPLADES) and the NGO Ecological Action (AE) – this last was an organization that I already knew was opposing the PSB, labelling the Program as a green capitalist mechanism.

Following this exploratory work, I determined on the preliminary actors of the first and second research foci. State-linked environmentalism was initially explored by reviewing the documents produced by SENPLADES, such as the National Plans for ‘Good Living’ (SENPLADES 2007, 2009, 2013); this was appropriate for the aims of the study as it was the only state agency still using the terms. I also reviewed in depth the 2008

Constitution. Later I examined documents produced by and about the PSB as a potential subject for my analysis of green capitalist mechanisms.

For the second research foci – non-governmental environmental action - I chose to focus my investigation on the work of environmental organizations enrolled in two national networks of environmentalists: then National Environmental Assembly (ANA) and the Ecuadorian Committee of Organizations for the Defence of Nature and the Environment (CEDENMA). Given the wide diversity of environmental NGOs working in the country, this decision was aimed at capturing a representative cross-section of such diversity that otherwise would have been impossible, something that the case study approach facilitates (Rocheleau 2015). I conducted semi-structured interviews to those environmentalists from November 2012 to August 2013, using an interviewing guide (Appendix A; see section 3.4.1 for a full explanation of the interviewing process and rationale). Conducting interviews of such a wide range of environmentalists was pivotal for the future direction of the research as it became clear that both AE and another NGO, the Pachamama Foundation (PF), were the only two environmental organizations which were actively using and promoting the notions of *buen vivir*, the rights of nature or *pachamama*, and also territory.

As the interviewing and document research continued, I began to firm up my target area of research that would be worthy of investigation for this PhD. The intention was to select a particular mechanism of green capitalism as it related to, and impacted on, community-based ecologism. Further interviews were carried out both with environmentalists and indigenous representatives who were engaged with the Payment for Ecosystem Services schemes and other financial mechanisms. This provided me with a preliminary overview of green capitalist strategies in Ecuador. It soon became clear that there were many failings in the implementation of the mechanisms by the state, while within the private sector only a few companies in existence were genuinely committed to carrying out 'green business'. So I decided finally to focus on the PSB for two reasons. On the one side, it was being labelled as a green capitalist strategy by some of my interviewees and indigenous organizations (AE, PF, CONAIE and CONFENIAE; see more on this in Chapter 5). But it was also the most developed mechanism at the time, and it was growing rapidly, enrolling indigenous communities and generating strong opposition. I was curious to understand whether this *governmental program* was a green capitalist mechanism strictly speaking and how it has impacted in community-based conservation. The dynamic between governmental and community-based conservation is a key research interest of political ecology that



has been studied commonly via the case study approach (Bryant 2000, Himley 2009, McAfee and Shapiro 2010, Asiyanbi 2016).

Having selected the PSB as the green capitalist mechanism to investigate, and in order to answer RQ2 and RQ3, I then needed to identify the organizations that had opposed the PSB. Recall that I had already interviewed some of the heads of the NGOs who belong to ANA and CEDENMA and I had defined that only AE and PF were using the terms. So I decided to build on the findings of my earlier assessment of NGOs by selecting AE and PF, which were operating under the key notions of interest and were also the only two NGOs actively challenging the PSB. In order to gain a fuller understanding of their position and approach, I decided to interview the remaining personnel while reviewing all their promotional material in the form of text, booklets, and videos. I also attended public events AE and PF organized on relevant topics of interest to the research. Additionally, I engaged in an AE study group with a particular focus on forest conservation. My approach to this study of both NGOs and their allies (i.e. CONAIE and CONFENIAE) was ethnographic.

Finally, I confirmed that Tola Chica community had rejected the PSB on the same basis as CONAIE and CONFENIAE. I was aware also, from my previous work with them, that they were engaged in collective forest conservation. Hence Tola Chica suggested itself as an ideal location for exploring the everyday environmentalism of an indigenous community. Bearing in mind at all times my objective of coming up with socially meaningful research and my academic positionality, the collective approach of the community to managing the forest could be held up as an inspiration for a political alternative to green capitalism. Hence, between March 2013 and October 2013 I moved to Tumbaco' valley to conduct ethnography in the community, and since Tumbaco is relatively close to Quito (40 minutes by bus), I was able to go to Quito whenever needed to follow up on leads or to interview new people. Throughout, I also continued reviewing relevant documents while doing participant observation at environmental events as they arose.

Hence, to capture such a complexity, the research was organized in relation to the aforementioned three key foci: state-related environmental activity, non-governmental environmental actions, and local community-based ecologism. The resulting case study design contained three embedded sub-cases or "nested units within the main unit" (Yin 2012: 7): (1) the state-led *Programa Socio Bosque*, (2) environmental NGOs and grassroots organizations enrolled in two national networks (ANA and CEDENMA) and the associated indigenous organizations (CONAIE and its regional affiliates), and (3)

the Tola Chica indigenous community. The findings of each sub-case were later appropriately presented in the empirical chapters of the thesis (Chapters 5, 6 and 7, respectively). Next, I will briefly explain in more depth how and why those sub-cases were selected.

### **3.3.2 The state-led Programa Socio Bosque**

The *Programa Socio Bosque* (PSB or ‘forest partner programme’) was created in 2008 by the Ecuadorian government for the conservation of nearly 4 million hectares of forests and other native ecosystems. The conservation occurs due to a payment to landowners who promise to safeguard their lands as specified by the government.

The PSB is a governmental programme that is known internationally as a domestic version of REDD+ (De Koning *et al.* 2011, Ecological Action 2012a, Krause and Loft 2013). For now, the PSB receives official funding, but in the future it is expected to gain access to funds from REDD+ mechanisms (Hall 2011) and PES schemes. The link between the PSB and these market-driven mechanisms raises even more concerns from critical ecologists and indigenous organizations, which are already connected to the global resistance to REDD+ and PES (e.g. the People’s Summit Rio+20, the Global Alliance Against REDD). What interested me about this programme is that, while REDD+ and PES are clearly market-driven mechanisms and examples of neoliberal environmentalism (Bakker 2010, McAfee 2015, Asiyanbi 2015, 2016), the PSB’s funding still comes from the state and hence its connections to green capitalist markets remain ambiguous, even as opposition to it mounts in the country.

In addition, the PSB served me by “binding the case”, that is, defining what the case was not (Yin 2009). This requires demarcating the case in order to concentrate on what is of interest to the research (Baxter and Jack 2008) – namely, how a broadly-based Ecuadorian environmentalism understands and uses *buen vivir*, nature and territory terms in a charged political context where opposition to green capitalist interventions was vocal and growing but overshadowed by the manifest opposition to the extractive industry which dominated the environmental discourse. In this sense, the PSB helped me to concentrate on the green capitalism mechanisms in relation to the topic of forest conservation while excluding for example initiatives linked to green energy transitions. As the investigation was being delineated in terms of definition and context (Miles and Huberman 1994) I was also concerned to control the scope of the investigation in order to carry out the necessary research within a manageable timescale. However, since I was interested in understanding the interrelation of complex ideas such as *buen vivir*, rights of nature or *pachamama* and territory, at times the extent of the research would

necessarily go beyond the topic of forestry to explore its uptake and impact on environmental thought and the diverse types of environmentalism (an area of particular debate and complex political ecologies – and hence, of great interest to this study).

### **3.3.3 Non-governmental environmentalism**

According to previous studies on Ecuadorian environmentalism, non-governmental environmentalism appears to be composed of three main actors: 1) local communities and grassroots organizations affected by development projects and/or involved in environmental projects; 2) social organizations with environmental concerns; and 3) environmental NGOs (Fontaine 2007, Andrade *et al.* 2008). Here, though, it is best to focus analytically on two strands (with the first strand treated separately, see below): mainstream environmentalism and critical ecologism, the main features of which are discussed in Chapter 6 (see also Varea and Barrera 1997, Latorre-Tomás 2009). So, to capture this diversity in order to have a ‘revelatory’ sub-case (Yin 2012) I focused on two national networks of environmentalists: the Ecuadorian Committee of Organizations for the Defence of Nature and the Environment (CEDENMA) and the National Environmental Assembly (ANA). CEDENMA is a constellation of environmental NGOs while ANA is comprised of both NGOs and also of grassroots organizations that do not necessarily hold the legal status of an NGO; further, both mainstream environmentalists and critical ecologists converge in the two networks in a nested and overlapping organizational way (Rocheleau 2015).

CEDENMA lists 50 NGO members and ANA is formed, in turn, of 7 national networks: the Committee for the Defence of the Mangrove Ecosystem (C-Condem), the Amazon Defence Front (FDA), CEDENMA, the Forum of Hydric Resources, the Ecuadorian Coordinator of Agroecology (CEA), the Plurinational Federation of Communitarian Tourism (FEPTCE), and the Regional Coordinator of Intag (an anti-mining organization). Both ANA and CEDENMA function as political representatives of their members even as both contributed political proposals that were submitted to the ANC of 2007 (see Chapters 4 and 6), which included the notions that are of interest to this PhD. As the fieldwork progressed, I chose to focus in on members of CEDENMA and ANA that were openly critical of green capitalism and who deployed the ideas on which this thesis is focused. Indeed, particular attention was paid to two NGOs that unmistakably stand against the PSB and REDD+ mechanisms (i.e. EA and PF), contrasting their position with that of those members of CEDENMA who are, conversely, supporters of green capitalism.

My focus on national discussions and debates relating to the understanding of *buen vivir*, rights of nature (*pachamama*) and territory, inescapably led me to consider in this sub-case, the country's indigenous organizations, attuned also with my positionality. Although the convergence between certain environmentalists and some indigenous organisations is not new – it dates back to the 1990s (Andrade *et al.* 2008) - the forms in which the two are intertwined in regard to green capitalism certainly is a new phenomenon, and so an examination of this development was essential for this thesis. The Ecuadorian indigenous movement comprises three national organisations: the National Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE); the Council of Evangelic Indigenous Peoples and Organisations of Ecuador (FEINE); and the National Confederation of Peasants, Indigenous and Black Organisations (FENOCIN). CONAIE is the largest one of them, and in turn has three regional affiliates: ECUARUNARI in the Andes, CONFENIAE in the Amazon, and CONAICE in the Coast. The regional organisations group together local organisations that collate, in turn, organisations at the village-level, namely the communitarian assemblies (Andrade *et al.* 2008). Tola Chica community (see below) is integrated into this structure. Of all these organizations, this PhD focused on CONAIE, ECUARUNARI and CONFENIAE, as they were found to be most sympathetic to the critical ecologists' stance against green capitalism while being most active in the use the notions featured in this PhD.

A naturalistic approach (Stake 2005) was used here to refine the unity of the sub-case in an iterative process through progressive engagement with it. This was helpful considering that environmentalists are unlikely to form a clear-cut identifiable group (unlike, say, the Tola Chica community for example). Hence, the limits of the group in question here were established through identifying the *common* topic of interest binding them together (Yin 2012); this required a pragmatic approach (Stake 2005) by which is meant that the case was defined on the ground and embedded in its context.

### **3.3.4 Tola Chica community**

In looking for the elements of concrete political alternatives to green capitalism (i.e. the PSB), I had noticed that many indigenous communities were actually choosing to enrol in the PSB (notably in the Amazon) – thereby complicating my aim to assess indigenous community *opposition* to green capitalism, which I nonetheless knew existed in the country. Fortunately, I had learned through one of my networks that the Tola Chica community had refused to enrol in the PSB, exhibiting an apparent environmental rationality put in motion to protect a remnant of Andean forest inside the community's territory and to produce agroecological products for the local market. This

distinctly alternative stance to green capitalism regarding forest conservation best fitted my research concerns, and hence became the focus of the third sub-case – a community located near to the capital city, Quito.

Instrumental and naturalistic approaches (Stake 2005) were considered here in defining the Tola Chica sub-case, that is, a way in which to choose a specific case of a more general phenomenon embedded in a particular context. The community is an example of a broader set of indigenous communities nationally that have deployed environmental ideas in their local social and ecological practices. Thus, in Tola Chica, residents conserve a remnant of Andean forest inside their territory, reforest adjacent land, produce for local markets agroecological crops and, lately, have become interested in ideas about ecological urbanization and agroforestry. All of these practices can be seen to be alternatives to green capitalism and are not confined to forest conservation. In addition, Tola Chica's leaders have affirmed publicly that the diverse practices just noted are in fact examples of the *buen vivir* set of principles that respect *pachamama* in the context of indigenous territoriality – i.e. key concerns for this PhD. Furthermore, Tola Chica, as with other indigenous communities in Ecuador, maintains collective structures of government and decision-making (e.g. Community Assembly, *mingas*<sup>12</sup>), which are seen to be crucial elements of *buen vivir* (Macas 2010).

Additionally, Tola Chica is embedded in a context of a semi-urban matrix. Thus, besides my previous work with them and familiarity with their political processes, it interested me and seemed apposite as part of this research to explore the notions in such a context, one that represents the mixed character of the plurinational Ecuadorian state that sustains indigenous territoriality (Simbaña 2005, 2009). As such, the indigenous political administration overlaps with the national state administrative structure: Tola Chica is part of the *Kitu-Kara* people, who are part of the *Kichwa* nation<sup>13</sup> and hence relates directly with ECUARUNARI; and, at the same time, it belongs to a borough of the rural parish of Tumbaco of the Metropolitan District of Quito (Municipality of Quito 2010). Hence, Tola Chica is a mixed community where *Kitu-Kara* and *mestizo* people cohabit in a semi-urban space embedded in capitalist relations of production and consumption.

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<sup>12</sup> *Minga* is a kind of compulsory collective work that has collective benefit, e.g. building a road or a water system that an entire community will use. The word is in Kichwa language (Hidalgo-Capitán *et al.* 2014b).

<sup>13</sup> Defined by having Kichwa as a first language and Spanish as a second language (CODENPE 2012).

Thus, the Tola Chica sub-case permitted me to study the issues of interest to this thesis in a dynamic situation of a self-identified indigeneity that is in permanent negotiation with a non-indigenous political order embedded in a context of capitalist relations. In doing that, I sought to study alternatives to state-led environmental activities (i.e. the PSB) in reference to historically-situated indigenous communities. At the same time, that the Tola Chica community and sub-case is embedded in the broader dynamics of Ecuadorian environmentalism helped me to understand the complex political processes that are at stake behind the adoption of the described ecological practices by an indigenous community, and to what extent the notions I am interested in were appropriated to various ends by powerful individuals as well as less powerful residents at the village level, all with their own specific aims and interests. Finally, the choice of this sub-case permitted me to assess the importance of ideas about territory and place-based alternatives in the articulation of alternatives to green capitalist practices.

### **3.4 Methods**

Having set out the main elements of the research design, it is now possible to turn to the specific methods chosen as well as the practical outcomes of such choices. So much for the broad structure of the fieldwork plan – the discussion next presents the methods, techniques and procedures used for data collection, mindful of the positive and negative outcomes of the chosen methods, as well as how any resulting issues or problems were handled.

#### **3.4.1 Interviewing**

I conducted interviews as a key means of data collection in order to explore the interpretations and perceptions of different actors involved in Ecuadorian environmentalism, including members of the Tola Chica community, and with regard to the topics of *buen vivir*, rights of nature or *pachamama* and territory within the context of opposition to manifestations of green capitalism in the country.

Three types of interviews were used: semi-structured, unstructured and group interview (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). The unstructured interview is more of an informal conversation, a type of conversation with intent, in which the interaction between researcher and informant is more dynamic and, to some extent, conducted by the informant even as the researcher nonetheless poses the topic (Dunn 2010). Hence, unstructured interviews were applied opportunistically, for example, in non-planned encounters with informants at public events, or during the participant observation

process. Unstructured interviews were crucial in the exploratory phase of the research design and helped to define the research foci and actors of Ecuadorian environmentalism. Although maintaining a list of topics, I was able to move freely from one topic to another and obtain greater insight into, for example, who used the terms, what was their understanding of green capitalism or how environmentalists regarded their own role.

This type of interview proved to be particularly helpful with both the elders and women of the Tola Chica community – individuals who were not used to interacting with outsiders (still less being formally interviewed) and accordingly were often withdrawn when approached by outsiders – even by an Ecuadorian female student like myself! Here, the unstructured interview helped to create a relaxed ambience where participants felt welcome to share their ideas (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). In this way, I was able to grasp a sense of how the *comuneros* felt regarding topics such as forest conservation, *pachamama*, the community's territory or the ecological projects and to fully understand inner community dynamics and power relationships.

The semi-structured interview provides tools to listen carefully and gather information systematically, to which purpose an interview guide is prepared (i.e. an open-ended questionnaire, available in Appendix A) to maintain a certain level of structure and order, but also fluidity (Dunn 2010, Longhurst 2003). This type of interview has a conversational, semi-formal character, that helps informants to feel comfortable, encouraging them to speak freely and ask their own questions (Davenport and Anderson 2005, Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Once I had defined the three research foci and chosen the respondents, I was able to proceed with the semi-structured interviews, see below. I used the semi-structured interview to explore whether the different actors used the notions of *buen vivir*, the rights of nature or *pachamama* and territory in their everyday practices, and ascertained their position regarding green capitalism. I conducted the interviews during pre-arranged sessions at their offices or in public spaces.

Informants for semi-structured interviews were selected by 'purposeful sampling' – a process that seeks out individuals who are knowledgeable about a specific issue (Creswell 2013). At the state-linked environmentalism research foci, I was also able to interview 3 officers from the Ministry of Environment who work in the Sub-secretariat of Natural Patrimony, the *Programa Socio Bosque*, the National REDD+ Programme and UN-REDD, or the United Nations office for REDD+ in Ecuador, as well as 2 officers

from the National Secretariat of Planning and Development (SENPLADES), which is the entity responsible for the National Plan for Good Living.

To ascertain which interviewees to approach at the non-governmental organizations research foci, I constructed a preliminary database of environmental organizations, using information contained in Varea and Barrera (1997), Fontaine (2007) and Latorre-Tomás (2009). However, these were already out-dated. So, after conducting preliminary unstructured interviews to environmentalists and scholars, participant observation and documents review, I focused on the members of the Ecuadorian Committee of Organizations in Defence of Nature and the Environment (CEDENMA, the national coalition of environmental NGOs) and of the National Environmental Assembly (ANA, which aggregates networks of grassroots organizations). The purpose was to get a national overview of Ecuadorian environmentalism in relation to the topics of interest to this PhD. Hence, 11 interviews were conducted at CEDENMA and 5 at ANA<sup>14</sup> including both supporters and detractors of green capitalism. From these interviews, I verified that only two environmental actors actively used the *buen vivir* and rights of nature (*pachamama*) ideas (Ecological Action and Pachamama Foundation). Similarly, both NGOs are critical of the PSB although for different reasons. Hence, I decided to focus on them in more depth, conducting 8 interviews in all there. Such an effort was complemented by a series of interviews conducted with other participants in the civil society sector, viz., environmental activists involved in forest conservation challenging green capitalist endeavours (4), personnel from NGOs outside of CEDENMA involved with the REDD+ and PES schemes (3), and representatives of indigenous organizations (6).

Finally, I interviewed critical scholars who were working on diverse socio-environmental aspects, from a political ecology perspective, in four Ecuadorian universities (9). The complete list of codified interviews can be seen in Appendix B. The purpose of interviewing this last group was twofold: on the one side, it was designed to achieve a deeper understanding of Ecuadorian environmentalism, including the manifestations of green capitalism in Ecuador; on the other side, I was resolved to share my preliminary findings in order to triangulate data and assure the validity of the research (see section 3.1).

In Tola Chica, I ensured a similar process, by carrying out purposeful sampling of informants based on preliminary data provided by 'gatekeepers', in this case, members

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<sup>14</sup> CEDENMA lists 50 NGO members in total, however few of them are active (NGO representative 1, 2012; NGO representative 11, 2013). ANA accounts 7 network members, only 5 are active.



of the Network of Seeds Guardians (Red de Guardianes de Semillas or RGS in Spanish). The information gathered from my gatekeepers through unstructured interviews was then complemented by the findings of participant observation as well as documentary assessment (Creswell 2013). From such an arrangement of information and as the fieldwork progressed, I selected my informants among *comuneros* (see below). But first, in January 2013, and as noted before, I presented a formal written petition to the community's Assembly asking for authorization to conduct participant observation and interviews with *comuneros* followed by my attendance at the February Assembly where I also explained my objectives verbally. At that meeting I was asked (and agreed) to conduct group interviews instead of individual interviews; the Secretary then divided the 64 community members into 4 equally-sized groups in which participation was voluntary. I conducted 3 group interviews during April 2013 (for the last one unfortunately nobody came) that lasted around 2-3 hours each. The group interview is a purportedly "non-directive" method that aims to "promote variety of viewpoints on the topic in focus for the group" (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009: 150). As the moderator, I thus introduced the topic and facilitated conversation keeping the group broadly on topic, but nonetheless allowing free conversation to "explore the topic from as many angles as they please" (Clifford *et al.* 2010: 103). True, this sort of interview is recommended for 6 to 12 participants (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009), and each of my groups consisted of 16 members – but I knew that not all of them would actually attend the sessions. In the end, the first consisted of 8 participants, the second 7 and the third 7 again.

I found the group interviews to be especially rich in terms of providing historical data as well as in offering a unique opportunity to observe social interaction in the context of topics at the heart of this PhD. I usually started by asking them to draw a timeline of the community's history, from which I located the point at which the community came into possession of the forest and decided to conserve it. After that, I asked them to look at the community's territory map and talk about the territory, the community. Finally, I asked them directly about the notions of interest to my PhD, finding that they were not familiar with them. Such interviews also provided me with vital information about political affiliations and loyalties, contradictions and power relationships amongst members.

I also conducted semi-structured interviews with selected individuals in the Tola Chica community, identified both from participant observation and the preliminary unstructured interviews. I used the same interview guide as was used with the rest of interviewees (Appendix A). When interviewing individuals, I took special care to not

engage with only one group (i.e. the ecologists and their supporters), but to move among the entire community to thereby be able to gather different points of view (Haenfler 2004). This is why I used unstructured interviews extensively during participant observation with both men and women including the elderly. In total, I interviewed 16 individuals; two of them were interviewed twice as they are also members of the national indigenous organization, CONAIE. In the Appendix B they are listed in this second group, as 'indigenous representatives'. Along with the 22 people involved in the 3 group interviews, I finally interviewed a total of 38 participants in Tola Chica.

I digitally recorded and transcribed the semi-structured interviews conducted with government officers, as well as in the case of the community group interviews. Meanwhile, for the semi-structured interviews with other actors (i.e. NGO members, political activists, indigenous representatives), I took extensive notes, reviewing them immediately after the end of the interview; I carried out a similar process with the unstructured interviews. Such note-taking was the preferred option because I found that, especially with regard to non-governmental environmentalists, it led to a more relaxed and open exchange. Each interviewee was then assigned a code (these are used throughout Chapters 5-7 in referencing specific interviews to assure anonymity).

Certainly, problems would arise during the process of interviewing. Gaining access to some people, especially senior government officers (e.g. the Sub-secretariats of Biodiversity and Climate Change) proved tricky due either to a lack of interest or of time. However, I was able to interview the directors of the key agencies (e.g. the PSB, REDD+ related agencies). Interviewing senior leaders of the indigenous movement was difficult as well – often, as with the Director of the PF, they were abroad. However, here too, perseverance paid off as I was able to interview some of its key members and complemented the data during public events where I was able to record their public speeches (see below).

Casting a pall over this entire process was the fact that my fieldwork took place in a tense political atmosphere in Ecuador that was steadily becoming more and more unfavourable towards NGOs – something that in all probability (but in hard to define ways) influenced my research (see Chapter 6 for more detail on this). This was one of the reasons I decided not to digitally-record the interviews with NGO participants and to use, whenever available, less 'intrusive' sources of information such as the public appearances of prospective interviewees as well as publicly-available documentation (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009; see below).

### 3.4.2 Participant observation

Participant observation was another vital method used and is an important part of the ethnographic approach to gather context-dependant data (Doolittle 2015). Indeed, the method implies an intention to observe and participate in the situation under analysis, but also an ability to position oneself strategically to attain systematic understanding of a given situation (Bryman 2012). Participant observation is not fixed, since the researcher can move along a continuum from being an absolute observer to a complete participant, and this constitutes one of the advantages of the method. The possibility to move allows the researcher to analyse a given situation from many perspectives (Creswell 2013).

This method proved to be highly useful in ascertaining political strategies and forms of negotiation, as well as modes of social positioning and articulation, among the various stakeholders. Between November 2012 and August 2013, I thus participated in meetings, workshops, assemblies and conferences organized by CEDENMA, ANA, EA and the PF. This was most useful for interviewing and gathering information from ANA and CEDENMA members from outside Quito. These events were a unique occasion to witness the internal dynamics of these national networks (as well as affording me the chance to interview opportunistically stakeholders from far-flung parts of the country). Similarly, I also attended workshops and meetings of critical ecologists, political activists and scholars regarding forest conservation and the carbon market, payment for ecosystem services, the *Programa Socio Bosque* and REDD+. The main objective during these events was to understand the context and forms in which the notions of *buen vivir*, rights of nature or *pachamama* and territory were used. Another significant benefit was having the opportunity to observe and comprehend the dynamic interaction between different actors and their political stances regarding the PSB or other financial mechanisms (i.e. critical ecologists and indigenous leaders and representatives).

Other fruitful spaces for participant observation were public demonstrations organized by critical ecologists together with indigenous organizations. These are rather spontaneous incidents that can nonetheless provide valuable information, and hence were addressed with flexibility (Creswell 2013). The rallies were organized variously to support trials in defence of the rights of nature, to stop oil drilling in the Yasuni National Park, and to present an international campaign against the advancement of the oil extraction frontier and the start of open-pit mining projects. In those events, it was clear that *buen vivir*, *pachamama* and the defence of indigenous territories were notions strongly held that were understood as central to these specific contentions.

I attended conferences and debates about the PSB and the forestry sector in Ecuador, *buen vivir* and eco-socialism that were organized by the Ministry of Environment, SENPLADES and the National Institute of Higher Studies (IAEN, a governmental post-grad level university). There, I was able to ascertain the views of government officers who were normally unreachable for individual interview but whose testimonies were important for giving an insight into the viewpoint of the state, on the matters of interest for this PhD.

Participant observation was key to my fieldwork at Tola Chica. There, I participated in monthly Assemblies and *mingas*, as well as opportunistically in weekly meetings convened by the leadership. I also attended two festivals: the *Inty Raymi* or Festival of the Sun (a four-day party to commemorate the solstice of June and the harvest), and a party to raise money for the elderly living in the community. All of this provided me with a valuable insight into community organization and revealed areas of tension of interest to this study (i.e. forest conservation, community's territory, ecological projects and rationale). Alongside this, I did volunteer work at the tree nursery, the agro-ecological garden of a community member, and at the Network of Seed Guardians seed bank (all over a 3 month period). At the request of the Assembly, I became part of the technical commission into territorial planning. Here again, valuable information about the territory and its use was garnered (through two organizational meetings and one dedicated Assembly meeting – see Chapter 7).

An essential part of the research process was to record the findings systematically, for which textual, audio and visual methods were used (Longhurst 2003). Descriptive and reflective notes were taken to record what I was observing, but also noting the perceptions, feelings and opinions that emerged from what I was experiencing. Equally important was to record confusing or contradictory aspects, which were later used to contrast findings (Creswell 2013). For that, I digitally-recorded events when appropriate (because of the noise), except for the Tola Chica Assemblies. When recording was not possible, I took notes during the events and kept an up-to-date field diary to record data and personal impressions. I also took pictures whenever possible, but always while respecting the participants' privacy.

There were some challenges here. For example, working with indigenous communities can be difficult for outsiders (Ezeh 2003). I knew from previous experience working in this and other indigenous communities that, as a female, it would be relatively easy for me to work with women. However, I also knew that gaining access to older males, especially to those in positions of power might be another matter. In addition, my being

a middle-class, highly-educated person could intimidate some people while prompting resistance from others. Fortunately, by abiding to community norms, engaging in activities considered 'useful' (e.g. volunteering at the plant nursery) and moving among people and groups respectfully, these potential issues were diminished. That said, it was nonetheless clear that some community members retained an element of distrust, and so were unwilling to participate in group or individual interviews. However, despite the discomfort this generated at times, the situation in itself was revealing about local social dynamics, and could be triangulated with other data or reflections.

### **3.4.3 Documents**

Textual materials were collected to analyse stakeholder understandings of *buen vivir*, rights of nature (*pachamama*), territory and green capitalism (*Programa Socio Bosque*). I accessed material from an array of relevant institutions: National Secretariat of Planning and Development (SENPLADES), Ministry of Environment (*Programa Socio Bosque* and REDD+ National Programme), UN-REDD+ Ecuador; ANA and CEDENMA as well as member organizations; Ecological Action and Pachamama Foundation; Network of Seeds Guardians; Tola Chica community archives; and indigenous organisations involved with the PSB and nature conservation programmes: CONAIE, ECUARUNARI, CONFENIAE. In general, documents served to provide more information and, significantly, enabled me to crosscheck, triangulate, contextualize and problematize the findings from interviewing and participant observation.

Government reports and publications notably included the 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution (Republic of Ecuador 2008), and the three National Plans for Good Living (SENPLADES 2007, 2009, 2013). Publications of the Ministry of Environment included:

- Strategic Plan of the National System of Protected Areas of Ecuador 2007-2016 (Ministry of Environment 2007).
- Strategic Planning of the Ministry of Environment (Ministry of Environment 2010a).
- Forestry governance in Ecuador 2011 (Ministry of Environment 2011a).
- Baseline of deforestation in Continental Ecuador (Ministry of Environment 2012b).
- Updated compilation of environmental incentives (Ministry of Environment of Ecuador 2013a).

I paid particular attention to PSB documentation, including Ministerial Agreements and Operative Manuals of the Programme issued since 2008 which describe its functioning and rationale:

- Guide of procedures for [Programme] partners in the event of aggression against their properties (Ministry of Environment 2012).
- Systematization of Socio Bosque (Ministry of Environment 2012a).
- Successful experiences of collective partners (Ministry of environment 2012c).
- Socio Bosque Project. Administration Report December 2009-April 2013 (Ministry of Environment 2013c).
- Ministerial Agreement 169: Creation of the Socio Bosque project of the Republic of Ecuador. 14 Nov 2008.
- Ministerial Agreement 177: Operative Manual of the Socio Bosque Project 3/Dec/2008.
- Ministerial Agreement 115: Operative Manual of the Socio Bosque Project 12/Nov/2009.
- Synthesized Operative Manual of Socio Bosque Project. 2011.
- Ministerial Agreement 092: Operative Manual of Socio Bosque Project. Ecological restoration chapter. 10/Jul/2012.
- Resolution No. 007-CNC-2012 of the National Council of Competencies: For the regulation of the activities of forestation and reforestation with aims of protection and conservation, and its alternative benefits.
- Ministerial Agreement 131: To establish the National Programme of incentives for conservation and sustainable use of the Natural Patrimony "Socio Bosque". 19/DEC/2013.

Government documents were the main source of data for state-linked environmentalism. Review of these documents allowed me to undertake a deeper analysis of the state's approaches to the notions in question, the plans regarding advancing the elements of green capitalism and, importantly, the rationale and limits of its environmentalism (see more on this in Chapter 5).

Meanwhile, primary statistical information on Tola Chica was obtained from the community's leadership, who allowed me to analyse the census book<sup>15</sup>. Such data helped me to understand the internal structure of the community, as well as the definition of community members' and some kinship relationships.

Finally, peer-review published papers and reports by third parties (including local and foreign scholars) that analysed the functioning of the PSB were used. These works,

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<sup>15</sup> This is a registry of the community's members and their families. It is updated every two years and is registered every year with the Ministry of Agriculture as one of the prerequisites for maintaining legal personhood (Community Member 10, 2013; Republic of Ecuador 1937 [2004], Art. 9).

alongside the other textual documentation noted above, helped to clarify background information about events and people, clarify the occurrence of the core themes of interest in this PhD, and served as an added means of data triangulation. While in theory locating and obtaining permission to use some of this array of documents materials could have been somewhat of a challenge (Creswell 2013), this proved not to be the case in practice inasmuch as all the information gathered was in the public domain, and thus obtaining permission was not an issue.

#### **3.4.4 Audio-visual materials**

Recordings of public events were important sources too. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I attended public events organized by the government, environmentalists and critical ecologists such as conferences, forums, marches, and rallies. During such events I recorded the public speeches, later transcribing them. Video recordings from the Internet (i.e. YouTube) were another important resource. Public speeches are cited by full name, as they do not require anonymity, within the relevant chapters and are listed in the bibliography.

Spoken word resources from the Internet proved particularly useful when I needed to access and refer back to noteworthy discourses that were particularly important for this thesis. One important example was the speeches of critical ecologists and indigenous representatives made during the First and Second Rights of Nature and the Rights of Mother Earth Ethics Tribunal held in Quito in January 2014 and in Lima in December 2014, which I was not able to attend.

#### **3.4.5 Cartography**

Building on my account of documentary evidence, it is pertinent to note here that I gained access to the geo-referenced information of the PSB partners, which proved an invaluable resource for understanding the operation of play with this program across the country. With the assistance of the Collective of Critical Geographers of Ecuador, I was then able to produce a map of the lands inside the PSB and thereafter contrast it with information about the geographical distribution of both the extractive industries and protected areas. This was decisive for the analysis of the limits of state-linked environmentalism in Chapter 5.

In a similar way, I was able to obtain invaluable cartographic information about Tola Chica's territory and, remarkably, its aspirations in terms of territorial ordering (see Chapter 7).

### 3.4.6 Analysing the Data

The end-result of all of these varied means of data collection was a bounty of rich data that then needed to be sorted and analysed. Thus, participant observation and interviews produced extensive notes based on my observations, perceptions, opinions, thoughts and ideas, as well as those of course of all of the interviewees. I also had extensive notes from a large number of textual documents and audio-visual materials. The resulting narratives were organized in five categories for each sub-case after an initial iterative and reflective process to find patterns, common themes and relationships (Davenport and Anderson 2005) and to avoid dispersion (Yin 2009):

- (1) *buen vivir*, development
- (2) rights of nature or *pachamama* / the idea of nature / nature conservation,
- (3) territory / place / community / plurinationality
- (4) *Programa Socio Bosque* / REDD+ / green capitalism, and
- (5) environmentalism / environmentalists / social movements / political alternatives.

Similar categories were applied to the texts and audio-visual materials.

I used Microsoft Excel to categorize these extensive narratives, a worksheet application useful for taking ‘vertical’ readings across categories (vertical cells) to find patterns, core values and understandings (Creswell 2013) of nature, *buen vivir*, *pachamama*, green capitalism, territory and community. So, while processing the data in this way, I progressively constructed a thesis and arguments related to my research questions, taking full advantage of the rich plurality of data (Doolittle 2015). The categorization was also helpful for crosschecking information in order to elucidate and double-check contradictory or unclear findings, as and when I needed to do so (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).

## 3.5 Summary

This chapter has described the qualitative methodology used for an empirical exploration of the resources for this thesis, which adopted ethnographic and case study approaches that allowed me to analyse a social situation in great detail and complexity within its broader context. Aspects of my positionality as a researcher, validity and reliability of qualitative methodology as well as ethical issues were considered. A detailed assessment of the research design of a single case with embedded sub-cases was discussed, including the positionality. Finally, the processes of data gathering (i.e.



the precise methods) were explained, highlighting the positive and negative outcomes of each one, the problems encountered during fieldwork and the ways in which they were resolved. A succinct summary of the data analysis procedure was provided at the end of the chapter. The following chapter aims to provide the requisite background on Ecuadorian environmentalism and leading on from this, detailed empirical analyses are provided in Chapters 5-7.

## Chapter 4 Research context

This chapter describes the material and historical conditions that led to the development of environmentalism in Ecuador and to the emergence and significance of the notions of *buen vivir* and the rights of nature or *pachamama*. It also describes how some environmentalists have converged with indigenous organizations at the discursive and material (i.e. social mobilization) levels nationally as well as in the territory of the Tola Chica community. Overall, this will give the necessary context for the in-depth analysis undertaken in the main empirical chapters (Chapters 5 to 7).

To this end, the current chapter firstly introduces the reader to the general context of Ecuador including a brief history of environmental change in the country, especially relating to the forest sector. Thereafter, the discussion follows the structure of the three research foci of the PhD – state-related environmental activity, non-governmental environmental action and local community-based ecologism – that, in aggregate, comprise Ecuadorian environmentalism. Finally, it zeroes in on the indigenous movement and how far it articulates with Ecuadorian environmentalism before ending up with an overview of Tola Chica community.

### 4.1 Ecuador, nature and environmental degradation

In terms of its basic geography, Ecuador covers an area of 283,561 square kilometres, sharing borders with Peru to the South and East, as well as Colombia to the North; the Pacific Ocean lies to the West. The Andes cordillera (mountain range) crosses the country longitudinally, and divides it into 3 geographical regions: the Coast, the Sierra and the Amazon. In Ecuador, the Andes are divided into two chains – the Western and the Eastern cordilleras - with a series of fertile valleys between them. The case study site of the indigenous community, Tola Chica, is located in one of these valleys. (Meanwhile, the Galápagos islands, located 1,000 kilometres away from the mainland are the fourth geographical region). With regard to human settlement, the Ecuadorian population is nearly 14 million people, mainly concentrated in three cities: Guayaquil (the main seaport), Quito (the capital city) and Cuenca. Until the start of the 1970s, the economy was mainly agricultural, failed attempts at industrialization notwithstanding. But in that decade the country became an oil producer in a transition that transformed social structures while accelerating environmental degradation (Acosta 2009). Mining and agribusiness soon followed causing yet more social and ecological disruption in the decades that ensued (Latorre-Tomás 2009, Carrión and Herrera 2012).

Such large-scale development interventions were important precisely because of the rich natural biota in the country that it threatened. Thus, contemporary Ecuador retains

important remnants of native vegetation – namely, humid and dry tropical forests, montane forests, mangrove forests and paramo - amounting to in total about 57% of the area of the country (Figure 4.1 notes this remnant vegetation in a matrix of cultivated areas). Of that, 80% was forests and 9.7% was paramos<sup>16</sup>. There is nonetheless great variation in the vegetation cover across the nation. Thus, the Amazon maintained 89% of it, the east Andean slopes about 76%, the West Andean slopes 54%, the inter-Andean valleys only 49%, and the Coast but 28% (Ministry of Environment 2012b). Many of these forests and paramos are under threat (see below). This is a cause for great concern precisely because such vegetation comprises immense biodiversity: the 91 ecosystems are estimated to contain 369 species of mammals, 1,616 of birds, 396 of reptiles, 420 of amphibians, and around 20,000 plant species of which more than 4,000 are endemic (Ministry of Environment 2001). Indeed, this is often seen to be a globally important biota, designated top place in terms of the number of vertebrates per unit of area (Ministry of Environment *et al.* 2001), while being classified as one of the 17 mega-diverse countries in the world (Ministry of Environment 2010b).

Efforts to manage and/or protect this invaluable biodiversity reflect a complex lineage and set of socio-political dynamics. Thus, the state plays a major role via the agency called the National Patrimony of Protected Areas (PANE, Patrimonio de Áreas Naturales del Ecuador in Spanish) – it formally protects about 44% of the original vegetation. The rest is located in indigenous, afro-Ecuadorian and *montubio*<sup>17</sup> peoples' territories, that are sanctioned under Ecuadorian law even while overlapping with the jurisdiction of the PANE (around 30% of the PANE-managed lands overlap with these territories, albeit also with other private lands possessed by farmers). But aside from who owns what and where, most of the people that live near to such biodiverse areas have a long relationship of usage of the natural resources that they contain in a sense that they are co-producers of protected areas (Himley 2009). And, while the Ministry of Environment claims to try to harmonize indigenous collective rights with the wider purposes of national nature conservation, this is nonetheless a matter that is rife with social struggle, as this thesis highlights recurrently. For example, only one protected area – the Cofán-Bermejo Reserve - is managed by an indigenous group, the Cofán people of the Amazon (see Ministry of Environment 2007).

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<sup>16</sup> Paramo is the highland Andean ecosystem, usually located between 3,000 and 5,000 meters above sea level.

<sup>17</sup> In Ecuador the affiliation to a particular ethnic group is resolved through self-identification. So according to the last census, 7% of the Ecuadorian population considered themselves as indigenous, 7.2% as afro-Ecuadorians, 7.4% as *montubios*, 6.1% as whites, and the rest 71.9% as *mestizo* (INEC 2010).

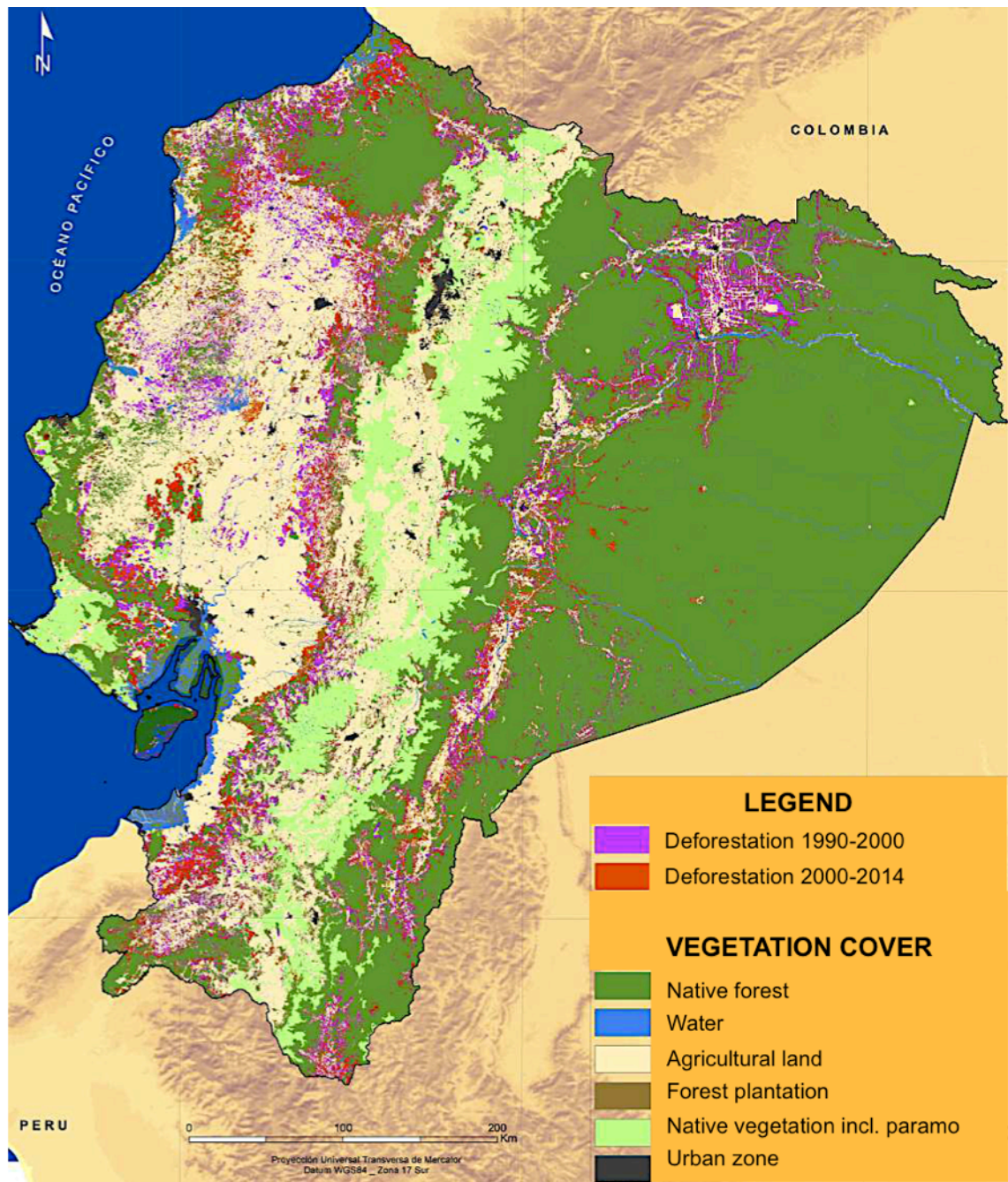


Figure 4.1 Map deforestation and vegetation cover of continental Ecuador.  
Source: Ministry of Environment 2015, modified by the author.

Adding further complexity and strife to this picture is the fact that lands earmarked for nature conservation efforts under PANE direction (some 20% of the country's entire continental land mass, see Ministry of Environment 2007) are often also claimed for development in the form of oil and mining extraction, as well as logging concessions. For example, 18% of the PANE's territory is actually controlled by oil companies, while illegal logging is pervasive (less than 30% of the traded wood in Ecuador is reputedly

extracted legally) (FAO 2005). Indeed, net deforestation was recently estimated at about 80,000 hectares per year between 1990 and 2008, giving an annual deforestation rate of approximately 0.66-0.71% (Ministry of Environment 2012b). Beyond oil, mining and logging activities, the main drivers here are the expansion of export-oriented agricultural monoculture and cattle pasture lands (SENPLADES 2013).

The upshot of all of this is massive transformation of the landscape and coastal seascape. In the Coast region today, the mangrove forests have almost completely disappeared in favour of shrimp farms, while its tropical forests have been replaced by monocultures of oil palm, cacao, banana and sugar cane. Remnant tropical forests to the north meanwhile are being systematically logged for national and international markets (Ministry of Environment 2007). In the Sierra, once cultivated with diverse crops mainly for local consumption, production has been focused on only a few products for export (e.g. flowers, broccoli, dairy products), while its residual montane forests can now only be found clinging to remote creeks and cliff sides – which is also where indigenous peoples are more and more pushed back to (Carrión and Herrera 2012). In terms of the Amazon, the north is these days a mosaic of industrial facilities for the extraction of oil and heavily polluted towns and rivers interspersed with vast stretches of tropical humid forest populated by indigenous peoples. Meanwhile in the south, indigenous populations face a similar story and must debate their options – between outright resistance to the entrance of oil and mining companies and the desire for community prosperity. Throughout the Amazon region, illegal logging is common (Ministry of Environment 2012b). Nationally, rapid urbanization has led to heavy air, soil and water pollution, for example, in 2011 only 50% of Ecuadorians had access to systems of waste management, while only 20% of private companies treated their wastewater (SENPLADES 2013).

From a political ecology perspective, such degradation has historical and structural reasons and is mediated by power relationships (Peet *et al.* 2011, Leff 2015), and as will be discussed further next. For my purposes, particular attention is given to the Sierra region (where Tola Chica is found) without missing the wider picture.

#### **4.1.1 A brief history of environmental degradation in Ecuador**

The societies that occupied the territory now called Ecuador before the Spanish invasion certainly left their imprint on the landscape, albeit to a much lesser degree than in more recent times (Larrea 2006). Fertile areas on the coast and in the inter-Andean valleys were already cultivated at least 1,500 years ago, even as hunter-gatherers populated tropical forests. A dynamic social and economic exchange

emerged between the Andes, the Amazon and the Coast linked to regions as far away as (what is modern-day) Mexico and Chile. When the Inca Empire tried to establish itself in Quito (ca. 1460), there were around 2 million people living in the inter-Andean valleys with their own complex infrastructures (e.g. ditches, ridges, roads, towns, pyramids and ritual tombs). Clearly, this was no pristine social or ecological order (Larrea 2006).

Still, the human impact on the environment was notably ratcheted up when Ecuador became embedded in a European-oriented capitalist system following Spanish conquest (Wallerstein 2001, Dussel 2002). In ecological terms, such integration signified ample natural resources extraction, landscape transformation, soil degradation and brutal human exploitation by the colonizers (Cuví 2005). Thus, the Spanish conquest did entail great changes, as evinced by such things as widespread depopulation<sup>18</sup> and specialized production of commodities for export (Larrea 2006). In the process, such change created a situation of local dependence on the European metropole that persists to the present day (Ruiz and Iturralde 2013).

Politically, the territory now known as Ecuador was then called the *Real Audiencia de Quito* and formed part of a regional administration that was centred on the highly lucrative silver mining operations at Potosi and the nearby town of Lima (both now in Peru). In this arrangement, Quito (as well as most of the adjoining Sierra) specialized in the production of textiles plus some small-scale mining (Alimonda 2015). A colonial hacienda system was elaborated here based on the severe exploitation of indigenous peoples who were reduced to the status of slaves (Guerrero and Ospina 2003, Simbaña 2009). In the Sierra, this oppressive system was notably used to undertake various activities including sheep rearing, while in the upper Amazon religious missionaries supervised extraction (Larrea 2006).

True, the environmental impact may have been reduced somewhat at first due to the Spanish-linked sharp fall in the local population. However, the Spanish brought new crops (e.g. wheat, barley) and livestock (besides sheep, horses, donkeys and cows), as well as new cultivation and construction techniques, all of which notably changed the landscape (Larrea 2006, Báez *et al.* 2004). By the end of the Spanish era, the inter-Andean valleys were widely cultivated and populated with livestock, towns were

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<sup>18</sup> It is estimated that by 1490 America was populated by 80-90 million people. Plagues, the conquest wars and forced and slaved labour diminished the population to 12-15 million people by 1570 (Larrea 2006). In Ecuador the population declined between 50% and 75% (Ramón 1987).

popping up all over, and the forests had been intensively used in all but the most inaccessible of places (Hidalgo-Nistri 1998).

After independence was won in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the hacienda model was consolidated in the Sierra as a system by which local elites could exploit indigenous labour (Guerrero and Ospina 2003, Simbaña 2009). This system exploited both people and nature well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hidalgo-Nistri 1998, see below). To some extent, environmental degradation was mitigated in this era in the Sierra due to uneven access to the international market; in contrast, the Coast region had no such 'problem' and was swiftly connected to it via cacao exports (Báez *et al.* 2004). So, whereas the forests that had once covered the central Coast had virtually disappeared in favour of cacao plantations over this period, counterpart montane forests in the Sierra persisted even though new tree species (such as eucalyptus and pine) increasingly made their mark on the landscape (Hidalgo-Nistri 1998, Cuví 2005).

Meanwhile, commodity boom followed upon commodity boom – first cacao then bananas and eventually oil. As such, neo-colonial exploitation persisted in the country including in the Sierra which was increasingly being articulated to the international market via the Coast<sup>19</sup>, even though the region only really developed its own fully-fledged agricultural commodity exports at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Zapatta *et al.* 2008). With such change came altered labour arrangements that notably got rid of some of the worst aspects of indigenous exploitation under the old system, even as much land was converted into highly-productive cattle ranches or even sold off to local communities (Guerrero and Ospina 2003, Simbaña 2009). Still, long-standing unequal power relations persisted as big landowners occupied the most valleys to produce export-oriented crops and impoverished indigenous peoples were pressed back into the highlands where climate conditions were harsh and ecological degradation thus hard to avoid (Larrea 2006) in a form of what political ecologists label 'ecocide' (cf. Blaikie 1985).

Not surprisingly, poor farmers and indigenous people regularly rose up in revolt against a system that punished them. Often, these were met by military force but also, on the occasion, by policy change – as with the agrarian reforms of 1964 and 1973 (Guerrero and Ospina 2003, Simbaña 2009). Such 'reforms' sought to diffuse popular opposition to the state via incremental land reforms in the Coast and in the Sierra regions, as well as targeting internal colonization of the Amazon. And yet, even this effort proved highly

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<sup>19</sup> The southern Sierra underwent its own process of development through direct exportation of a special commodity – the quina (a tree used to treat Malaria) – and some minor gold exploitation (Cuví 2005).

unsuccessful. In 1954, for example, 77% of small landowners<sup>20</sup> owned less than 7% of the land, while 1.7% of big landowners owned 64.4%. By 1994, that is well after the two agrarian reforms, 69.05% of small landowners owned 9% of the land, while 5.5% of large landowners controlled 49% (Zapatta *et al.* 2008).

But if these reforms failed to break up the hacienda system (Simbaña 2009), they did succeed in encouraging migration into the lower Amazon in a manner that enabled Ecuador to claim those strategic territories (and their oil resources) as their own (Fontaine 2007, Ruiz and Iturralde 2013). Alongside oil exploitation<sup>21</sup>, the state embarked on a national spending spree – such that external debt rose from USD\$260.8 million in 1971, to USD\$5,868.1 million in 1981, and to USD\$12,800 million in 1994 (Acosta 2009).

In the Sierra, all of this change “impelled a modernization that definitely linked the peasant with the labour market and left the productive lands to the agribusiness and capitalized peasants” (Varea and Barrera 1997: 75). In these conditions, small-scale peasants were either evicted or became landless workers in a process of re-concentration of land via the growth of large agribusinesses (Guerrero and Ospina 2003, Simbaña 2009). Widespread environmental degradation was the flip-side of such (unequal) 'development' (Cuví 2005, Larrea 2006).

And yet, some forests and paramos still remain today as noted earlier, even though most of them are located in the Amazon, in the northern Coast regions and high in the mountains (Ministry of Environment 2012b). Indeed, one-third of all native vegetation is found on indigenous territories in the Amazon where communitarian social organization and collective land ownership is the norm (Ministry of Environment 2007). In the Sierra, too, some indigenous communities have managed to hold onto patches of paramo and montane forest here and there (Guerrero and Ospina 2003, Simbaña 2009). In most cases, these communities hold the land collectively, while in others arrangements are more fragmented with land held by private owners, capitalized peasants, traders and small financiers. The rural Sierra is thus a mosaic of private and communal properties of *mestizo* and indigenous landowners, more or less dedicated to agriculture, commerce and the provision of some services (e.g. transportation, financing) (Brassel *et al.* 2008).

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<sup>20</sup> Small landowners refers to those properties of less than 5 hectares of land, while big landowners refers to properties of more than 100 hectares (Varea and Barrera 1994).

<sup>21</sup> Although Ecuador extracted oil since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Coast, it was only in 1972 that the country became an oil economy. Nowadays, 47.9% of its total exportations are oil (Ruiz and Iturralde 2013).



Indeed, those forested and paramo areas are nowadays the main focus of attention of the various environmental projects underway in the country (such the *Programa Socio Bosque*). Similarly, the Tola Chica case study indigenous community is located in the Sierra and seeks to conserve a small patch of its forest despite strong urban development pressures (see below). All of which underscores the need to be clear about *which* actors are involved in efforts to protect Ecuador's residual forests – a task to which this chapter now turns as it explores the different approaches being essayed by state and non-state actors in Ecuadorian environmentalism.

## **4.2 Ecuadorian environmentalism**

Scholars tend to agree that concern about ecological degradation began in Ecuador in the 1970s. As elsewhere, environmental consciousness was expressed notably through the creation of protected areas, the passing of environmental laws, and the emergence of environmental NGO (Fontaine 2007, Latorre-Tomás 2009, Muñoz and Hidalgo 2011). True, there were glimmers of environmental interest before then – for example, as witnessed in the declaration of parts of the Galapagos Islands as a protected area (c. 1936), as well as the founding of environmental institutions such as the Ecuadorian Institute of Natural Sciences (1940) and the National Committee for the Protection of Nature and the Conservation of Natural Resources (1952). However limited as well as restricted to upper-class professionals, this was nonetheless enough to introduce the topic into official discourse and better-off segments of Ecuadorian society (Cuvi 2005, Hidalgo 2011). Still, as noted below, real change came only after 1970.

### **4.2.1 The greening of the State**

Before 1970, the approach of the state to the environmental topic was “basically of the order of public health and to regulate the extraction of renewable and non-renewable resources” (Varea and Barrera 1997: 114). Hence, the exploitation of natural resources dominated the legislation, while the forests were still regulated in 1970 by an 1875 Act which declared that “the national forests are free of use for all Ecuadorians” (Cuvi 2005: 135). By 1971, though, a Law for the Preservation of Zones of Reserve and National Parks was already on the official books that incorporated ideas about natural preservation that went beyond mere utilitarianism (Echeverría 2011). Overall, though, subsequent legislation into the 1980s revealed a narrow focus on human health issues. Indeed, implementation of environmental rules in practice was not an official priority – for example, it took 15 years before the state finally passed regulations to accompany

and activate the Law for the Prevention and Control of Environmental Pollution (Varea and Barrera 1997).

Certainly, there was a flurry of official action in the wake of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit as the environment gained international traction. Environmental policies or programmes were created in just about every ministry of the state even as environmental NGO proliferated – all due to a surge in international funding. It was in this era that the Ministry of Environment was created (i.e. in 1996) and from the beginning it was wed to ideas about sustainable development and comprehensive environmental management (rather than a narrow stress on natural resources development); such thinking spread rapidly to other agencies and institutions in the country (Echeverría 2011). Environmental laws passed in the 1990s invariably summoned up the Rio 92 principles (Hidalgo 2011). Regarding forest conservation and protected areas in particular, it was officially recognised of the need to work with local people while respecting their rights, even as efforts were made to promote their participation in protected areas as well as searching for means to reduce their poverty. It was also recognized that environmental rights should be seen as collective rights (Ministry of Environment 2007).

Ultimately, however, all of this activity was dependent on external funding in a context in which the Ecuadorian state was still not committed or prepared to put up its own funds for nature conservation efforts (Varea and Barrera 1997). One example here was the National Environmental Fund that was used to finance the National System of Protected Areas; it was implemented in 1998 by the Ministry of Environment to function as a business trust that receives funds from abroad as well as from domestic sources (Muñoz 2011). Today, there are a variety of economic and market instruments designed to stimulate the conservation of nature:

- 1)** Tax exoneration for properties that retain forests and/or undertake productive activities that meet environmental regulations as well as actively prevent pollution.
- 2)** Direct payment for reforestation and conservation of forested areas (SENPLADES 2013), like the *Program Socio Bosque* and the National Strategy for REDD+. Such regulation also promotes non-economic incentives in the form of environmental prizes, public acknowledgment or technical support (Ministry of Environment 2013a).
- 3)** Payment for environmental services linked directly to actions by various levels or parts of the State itself (see also below) – for instance, local governments maintain systems of payment for the service of providing water to paramo communities.

4) Capitalist market mechanisms deployed in the country as part of a wider action plan to adapt to and mitigate climate change, like the creation of carbon and biodiversity markets as well as the advent of Clean Development Mechanisms (Ministry of Environment 2013b).

Then there was the passage of the landmark 2008 Constitution recurrently examined in this PhD thesis. It recognised the rights of nature (*pachamama*), established *sumak kawsay* as a key organising principle of the state, prohibited the private appropriation and commercialization of ecosystem services, declared Ecuador a 'GMO-free' territory, specified that it was a basic human right to have access to clean and abundant water (as well as a non-polluted environment), and even affirmed use of the precautionary principle for future development projects. However, at the same time, the 2008 Constitution sidestepped the prohibition of natural resources exploitation inside protected areas based on the argument that such exploitation was necessary to overcome poverty (Muñoz and Hidalgo 2011).

There has been harsh criticism of this 'greening' of the state. For example, as one of the first analysis of environmentalism puts it:

"environmental issues have been incorporated in every level and every public institution but that does not mean that there is a genuine interest in the defence of the environment. In reality, it is a 'smoke screen' to continue favouring a model based in maximizing profit at the lowest cost possible" (Varea and Barrera 1997: 328).

Indeed, and notably in relation to state-linked forest conservation initiatives, this thesis examines in greater detail in later chapters (especially Chapter 5) how far such environmental action simply amounts to a means to connect conservation strategies in the country to the international elaboration of green capitalism or, worse, to a business-as-usual capitalist accumulation.

#### **4.2.2 The greening of Ecuadorian society**

As noted above, environmental awareness in Ecuadorian society can be traced back to the preoccupation of some urban educated elites in the early-to-mid-20<sup>th</sup> century to link nature protection to the advancement of national political and economic goals (Cuvi 2005, see also Leff 2001); hence, the creation of the Ecuadorian Institute of Natural Sciences and the National Committee for the Protection of Nature and the Conservation of Natural Resources. Nevertheless, it was only when the first environmental NGO – Natura Foundation - was founded in 1978 that perspectives about the protection of nature began to change in fundamental ways (Muñoz and Hidalgo 2011).

Indeed, Natura Foundation (or the Ecuadorian Foundation for the Conservation and Protection of Nature) emerged then precisely in order to work on the interconnected matters of conservation, education, research and lobbying. It soon became a leading advisor to both the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environment on environmental issues; in effect, it held a key role in environmental policy-making throughout the 1980s and 1990s<sup>22</sup> (Varea and Barrera 1997). A few other NGO were created during these two decades as well prompted by growing environmental concerns as well as the high availability of environmental funding (Fontaine 2007).

Meanwhile, some big international non-governmental organisations (BINGOs) began to operate in Ecuador as early as 1961, when the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) started work in the Galapagos Islands to participate in the management of the protected area there. Besides WWF, other BINGO with activities in Ecuador included the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN, since 1991), the Nature Conservancy (TNC, since 1984), BirdLife (since 1991), Conservation International (CI, since 2001), and the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS, since 2001).

As such, during the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, national NGO and BINGO tended to work closely with the Ministry of Environment, serving as technical and policy-making advisors, executors of projects, and financiers (Muñoz and Hidalgo 2011). In fact, the NGO sector controlled most of the information and technical expertise that underpinned policy-making in this era – a ‘golden age’ that only began to change with the advent of President Correa government (see below).

In the early years, local NGO as well as the BINGO focused on biological and ecological research, species conservation and environmental education. Later on, they developed projects for sustainable development articulating nature conservation with ‘productive’ activities such as ecotourism, even as they advised on environmental legislation as well as conflict resolution issues around the country (Varea and Barrera 1997). Since 2000, they have explored diverse market mechanisms in a transition described as “a reaction towards the inefficiency of [State] environmental control” (Ecodecision 2002: 5) – but also mindful of changes towards international funding options. Such mechanisms have included payment for ecosystem services and other ‘green’ incentives, systems of payment for conservation and, lately, carbon and biodiversity trading initiatives (Muñoz and Hidalgo 2011). Indeed, one of the first projects for the conservation of watersheds and paramos in all of Latin America based

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<sup>22</sup> Natura Foundation closed in 2012 due to the inability to pay accumulated fines totalling USD\$4.5 million to the Mayor of Quito for allegedly non-appropriate management of the city’s landfill (Ecuador Inmediato October 10, 2012).

on market mechanisms was developed by an Ecuadorian NGO that later became a business enterprise (Ecodecision 2002). Similarly, Conservation International claims to have been the developer of a pilot project that eventually morphed into the *Programa Socio Bosque*, now aligned with the National REDD+ Strategy (see Chapter 5). Indeed, BINGO such as Conservation International and The Nature Conservancy are pioneers and keen advocates of the deployment of market mechanisms for nature conservation as part of the greening of capitalism in the country (Ramos 2010).

And yet, other NGO emerged beginning in the mid-1980s with a more “critical view of market actors and the institutional system” (Fontaine 2007: 235). Although fewer in number than their mainstream counterparts, these NGO challenged the utility of the concept of sustainable development as a guiding political and economic principle even as they firmly distanced themselves from emerging forms of market environmentalism (Hidalgo 2011). A key breaking point for them was how some environmental NGO (such as the Natura Foundation) were seen to be willing to work with the oil industry (Varea and Barrera 1997). In contrast, these more radical NGO (referred to as ecologists or even critical ecologists) specialized in investigating and denouncing oil exploitation, working closely with people affected by oil pollution and human rights abuses, even as their attention has increasingly turned to criticising those mechanisms of green capitalism that mainstream NGO support (Latorre-Tomás 2009, see also notably Chapter 6).

Still other NGO focus on the question of the country’s ‘food sovereignty’<sup>23</sup> through developing projects based on ecological forms of agriculture allied to local/regional markets based on solidarity and collective wellbeing (Andrade *et al.* 2008) – such as those environmentalists linked to the indigenous case-study site of Tola Chica community. Such NGO work with selected environmental NGO noted above in projects and networks, while emphasising their links to organizations of peasant producers, as well as urban and rural consumers, and indigenous organizations (Carrión and Herrera 2012).

The various types of NGO just discussed connect to local people across the nation affected by development projects, including oil and mining, agribusiness, big dams construction, shrimp farming and forest plantations (Fontaine 2007, Latorre-Tomás 2009). Hence, Ecuadorian environmentalism in its civil society aspects revolves around

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<sup>23</sup> Defined as “the right of nations and peoples to control their own food systems, including their own markets, production modes, food cultures and environments”, a term coined by the global peasants movement La Via Campesina (Martínez-Alier *et al.* 2011).

three main spheres: local communities and organizations with distinct ethnic affiliations (indigenous, *mestizo*, afro-Ecuadorian and *montubio*) and associated sorts of organization that are affected by development or environmental projects; social organizations whose interests notably also encompass environmental concerns (such as the food sovereignty NGOs); and environmental NGO (Fontaine 2007).

As elsewhere, steps have been taken over the years to organize and coordinate such a myriad of civil society actors. Thus, popular ecologists and diverse local people work together in the National Environmental Assembly (ANA, in Spanish), while other NGO form part of the Ecuadorian Committee of Organizations for the Defence of Nature and the Environment (CEDENMA, in Spanish) (Morales 2009). The latter was founded in 1987 as a result of the first Ecuadorian Congress of the Environment. And yet, the initial intention of including a wide range of actors (such as organizations representing peasants, workers and indigenous peoples) did not work out; as a result, CEDENMA focused only on coordinating member environmental NGO after 1990 (Latorre-Tomás 2009). Apparently, non-environmental organizations did not show enough interest in environmental issues at the time (Varea and Barrera 1997). Meanwhile, ANA was founded in 2005 comprised of 7 national networks: the Committee for the Defence of the Mangrove Ecosystem (C-Condem), the Amazon Defence Front (FDA), CEDENMA, the Forum of Hydric Resources, the Ecuadorian Coordinator of Agroecology (CEA), the Plurinational Federation of Communitarian Tourism (FEPTCE), and the Regional Coordinator of Intag (an anti-mining entity). Both ANA and CEDENMA presented (separate) proposals to the ANC in 2007 although, interestingly enough, neither proposal addressed the notions of *sumak kawsay* and *pachamama*, instead focusing on the question of territory as well as the right to live in a pollution-free environment (Morales 2009) –points that will be analysed later in this thesis.

Out of all of this civil society complexity, there has been somewhat of a convergence in the aims and interests of the ecologist NGO and national indigenous organisations (although such a convergence is not new, see Hope 2017). Key here is a shared antipathy to development based on an extractive model (Andrade *et al.* 2008, Bravo 2010). And central to this strand of Ecuadorian environmentalism is the battle against the oil industry in the Amazon and particularly against Texaco (today Chevron)<sup>24</sup> (Fontaine 2007, Latorre-Tomás 2009). Such conflict has been an especial concern of indigenous groups. Meanwhile, and at the same time as supporting this battle, NGO

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<sup>24</sup> The trial against Texaco began in 1993. It confronted 30,000 people affected by the operations of Texaco between 1967 and 1992 in Ecuador (Fontaine 2007). In 2012, an Ecuadorian court upheld the conviction against Chevron-Texaco (merged in 2001) (Delgado-Ramos 2013a: 326).

partners here have stoked suspicions amongst indigenous organisations about the intent behind and implications of the new 'green' instruments for forest conservation emerging on the horizon – to such an extent, that CONAIE, for instance, now strongly rejects REDD+ and the *Programa Socio Bosque* (CONAIE 2009, 2011). That said, there are other views among indigenous peoples about the utility of working with green capitalist projects – hence, the “stand on REDD+ in Ecuador is by no means monolithic. Proof of this is evident by the numbers of communities that have signed on to the government's *Programa Socio Bosque* despite CONAIE's rejection of it” (Reed 2011: 536). For this reason, this PhD will assess the evidence concerning environmentalist and indigenous convergence, as part of the wider examination of Ecuadorian environmentalism and the key concepts that animate it.

In this context, the emergence of the notions of *sumak kawsay* or *buen vivir* and the rights of nature or *pachamama* in the country is seen as the epitome of the environmentalist and indigenous convergence, and the latest development of Ecuadorian environmental policy (Acosta 2013a, Gudynas 2016).

Both notions were novelties introduced in the Ecuadorian Constitution approved by national referendum in 2008 (see Chapters 5 and 6; also Acosta and Martínez 2009, Gudynas and Acosta 2011, Sacher and Báez 2014). *Sumak kawsay* or *buen vivir* depicted the new organizing principle of the state while nature (*pachamama* or Mother Earth) was recognized as a *subject* of rights (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Arts. 71-73). This Constitution affirmed, too, the plurinational character of the Ecuadorian state – a new state model designed to acknowledge the country's cultural diversity and ancestral territoriality (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Art. 57, Sections 4, 5 and 9). All of this came about as the result of years of struggle led by the country's indigenous movement and their supporters, among which the critical ecologist stood out. *Sumak kawsay/buen vivir* were presented as a conceptual legacy of the Andean peoples, and defined as a 'living in harmony with nature' (Simbaña 2011, Gudynas 2016, Hope 2017), an alternative to development and the associated ideology of economic growth (Acosta 2013a, Dávalos 2014, Sacher and Báez 2014). The pledge for a harmonious coexistence with nature put the notion of *buen vivir* at the centre of a radical new environmental perspective that, associated to the notion of the rights of nature or *pachamama*, constituted for some authors a 'biocentric turn in politics' (Gudynas 2009, 2015, Velázquez-Gutiérrez 2014, see Viola Recasens 2014 for a critical assessment on this).

Still, their official recognition served to mainstream the terms, thereby stimulating a rich debate involving government officials (e.g. the compilations of SENPLADES 2010,

Farrah and Vasapollo 2011, Le Quang and Vercoutere 2013), scholars (e.g. Ecuador Debate 2011, Gudynas 2011, 2016 Radcliffe 2012, Lang and Mokrani 2013, Bretón *et al.* 2014, Merino 2016, Caria and Domínguez 2016, Gallardo 2017), indigenous intellectuals (Chancosa 2010, Macas 2010, Simbaña 2011) and political activists (e.g. Acosta and Martínez 2009, 2011, Ecological Action 2012b, Acosta 2013a, Dávalos 2014). The discussions revolved about how far these notions fit within post-colonial, post-neoliberal, post-extractive and post-human narratives; and although most of the scholarly production is concentrated in *buen vivir*, the few writers working on the rights of nature invariably connect both ideas (Gudynas 2013, Velázquez-Gutierrez 2014, Espinoza 2015, Kauffman and Martin 2017).

Among scholars, there is a growing consensus in that narrow and highly instrumental definitions deployed by the Ecuadorian government have refashioned *buen vivir* bit by bit into a post-neoliberal development narrative consonant with the perpetuation and indeed renewal of capitalism (Caria and Dominguez 2016, Ramírez-Cendrero, 2017), with elements of environmental sustainability added into the mix (Radcliffe 2012). The rights of nature or *pachamama*, in this context, had been transformed into a renovated form of environmental management in the never ending quest for sustainable development (Espinoza 2015, Kauffman and Martin 2017).

In turn, indigenous intellectuals have tended to emphasize extensively what *buen vivir* means in practice: collective and communal political structures, the end of exclusion and discrimination toward all peoples, harmony between material and spiritual spheres, interdependence and interconnectedness between humanity and nature, and local control of the means of production (Macas 2001, 2010, Simbaña 2011, Hidalgo-Capitán *et al.* 2014a). Two ideas are crucial for *buen vivir*, as conceptualised by indigenous intellectuals: (1) that indigenous people actually *use* nature and (2) that strong bonds bind people to concrete territories through material and spiritual bonds (Hidalgo-Capitán *et al.* 2014b). The former idea inevitably means that indigenous people do not search for or claim a preserved, untouched nature, but rather seek to use nature in a respectful manner, taking only what is necessary for the social reproduction of life. In this regard, they distance themselves from strict preservation initiatives that mandate, for example, enclosure of natural spaces to all human habitation and instead get closer to ideas of produced nature (Smith 2010). The latter idea sees territory as a specific space where harmony among humans and between humans and nature has to be constructed according to natural and cultural particularities, for what territorial autonomy would be necessary (Altmann 2013a).



These sorts of understandings appear to be at the basis of the interlinking between *buen vivir*, the rights of nature or *pachamama* and territory.

Most scholars have discussed to what extent *buen vivir* and the subjectivation of nature can be seen as emancipatory political alternatives. For some, the notions provide indeed the occasion to dream about a socialist utopia, an opportunity to theorise the end of a capitalist world-system with environmentalism, indigeneity, feminism and Marxism as complementary sources for a comprehensive theoretical-cum-political action plan (Dávalos 2014). Meanwhile, other authors still argue that the wider political effectiveness of the notions ultimately resides in its being in dialogue with other transformative theories, such as degrowth, popular in parts of the Global North (Escobar 2015), and ecosocialism (Le Quang and Vercoutere 2013). Yet for some writers the vagueness and ambiguity of *buen vivir* particularly, do not amount to a feasible political alternative and indeed has been sufficient to allow it even to be co-opted by governing elites (Sánchez-Parga 2011, Stefanoni 2012). For one critic, the fact that *buen vivir* was popularised during the decades of anti-neoliberal struggle means that its capacity for on-going critique of the hegemonic political economy may now be exhausted (Simbaña 2011); other writers feel differently seeing it, for instance, as “a smooth continuity of the neoliberal period” (Sacher and Báez 2014: 21) and perhaps even a source of environmental pragmatism (Lalander 2014).

However, the conceptual legacy of the terms is to have mainstreamed, for some time, the development critique (Acosta 2013a, Dávalos 2014, Sacher and Báez 2014) and the idea of ‘living in harmony with nature’ (Simbaña 2011, Gudynas 2016, Hope 2017). Both notions associated to ‘territory’ are believed to constitute a radical environmental politics that this thesis aims to explore. Hence it is central to this PhD to assess to what extent *buen vivir* – connected with the rights of nature or *pachamama* and territory - embodies such emancipatory vigour to inform a politics that confronts mainstream environmentalism and the development of green capitalism in the country. Equally important is to assess the place of those ideas within the environmentalists and indigenous movement’s convergence that allegedly gave rise to the notions in the first place.

## **4.3 Indigenous communities and environmentalism**

### **4.3.1 Ecuadorian indigenous movement**

Indigenous uprisings and revolts have been a permanent feature of life in Ecuador since the Spanish conquest and did not stop after independence (Guerrero and Ospina

2003). However, a powerful indigenous movement originated in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when “the pressure for land in the Sierra and the incipient colonization of the Amazon sharpened the contradiction between the indigenous people and the Nation State in Ecuador” (Varea and Barrera 1997: 93). In 1990, a nationwide uprising propelled CONAIE (National Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) into the public realm; henceforth, it was at the heart of indigenous social mobilization displacing unionist and peasants movements as the main actors (Dávalos 2002, 2005, Simbaña 2009). CONAIE soon gained a reputation for being one of the best organized indigenous movements in the entire region (Andolina *et al.* 2009); but after 2008, it faced new challenges from President Correa’s populist regime (Ospina 2009).

In general, indigenous mobilizations in the 1990s revealed the social power that had been acquired during the agrarian struggles of the 1960-1980 period that had undermined the much-hated hacienda system in the Sierra (Simbaña 2009). Out of those struggles emerged ECUARUNARI (Kichwa Confederation of Ecuador) in the Sierra in 1972 – which is the organization to which the Tola Chica community belongs. Similarly, CONFENIAE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon) emerged in 1980 based around claims about conservation of nature, ethnic identities, self-determination and territorial autonomy (Varea and Barrera 1997, Guerrero and Ospina 2003). Meanwhile, CONAICE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples of the Ecuadorian Coast) is the most recent addition to this group, being formed in 2007.

The creation of a coalition between the Sierra and the Amazon organizations gave rise to CONAIE. And, it is here that two key ‘moments’ in indigenous movement history of interest to this thesis are to be found. The first moment was anchored to the emergence of ECUARUNARI, and thus to revolts by peasants’ organizations in the Sierra against the abject conditions of exploitation inside the hacienda system. In this period, though, there was no emphasis on indigenous identities *per se* since claims were all about access to land and other means of production (Guerrero and Ospina 2003).

The second moment transformed this claim for land into the reclamation of *territory* as a space precisely in which to exercise cultural, social and economic autonomy, thereby firmly highlighting the question of indigenous identities and their right to self-determination (Dávalos 2002, 2005). Collective ethnic construction occurred along this shift from peasants claiming for *land* to indigenous claiming for *territories* in the 1990 decade. By the 1990s, though, this situation had begun to change as indigenous

identity was emerging as a potent way for marginalized rural and urban residents to make a claim against exclusion and oppression; hence, the struggle focused on recovering cultural practices while the intellectual practice began to recognize the category of 'indigenous' beyond that of 'peasant' (Altmann 2013a). Current claims of self-determination, self-representation and political autonomy, as well as associated control of ancestral territories (Andolina *et al.* 2009) are pulled together in Ecuador into one package promoting plurinationality (Sacher and Báez 2014), hence underscoring the influence of Amazonian politics on wider national trends<sup>25</sup>.

Put differently, the first moment, strongly influenced by socialist and communist parties<sup>26</sup>, assumed the form of class struggle with the historical subject being the peasant (i.e. the rural proletariat), while the second one assumed the form of a cultural/social struggle with re-invigorated indigenous identities as the historical subject (Moreano 1993, Simbaña 2009). In turn, this shift to an ethnic basis was linked to a greater willingness than before to adopt environmental topics among the indigenous movement's claims.

Such willingness was most clear in how the Amazon organizations in particular linked their political claims to addressing (among other things) environmental degradation on their territories. These organizations depicted the spiritual relation of indigenous people with nature – such that, claims for territorial autonomy and self-determination strongly implied the need to realize this particular relation with nature (Varea and Barrera 1997, Dávalos 2002). In fact, as this thesis discusses, indigenous leaders from the Amazon conceived *sumak kawsay* in particular as a cultural critique to the forms of development conducted by the Ecuadorian state and behind it the broken relation with nature being foisted on the country by the West (Altmann 2013b). Meanwhile, the Sierra organizations also embraced the 'ethnic turn'. Here, and with the collapse of the hacienda system, there was now an opportunity to advance a "positive and socially valued [indigenous] identity" linked to a politics of self-identification (Guerrero and Ospina 2003: 13, see also Simbaña 2009). And yet, the recent incorporation of environmental aspects into their demands remains a matter of tension inside these organizations – as will be examined in the context of the analysis of Tola Chica in Chapter 7.

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<sup>25</sup> Amazonian indigenous politics even influenced the creation of the national organization: at first, there was the Confederation of Indigenous *Nationalities* of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE), with CONAIE embracing the ethnic claim about indigenous peoples being recognized as *nations* – hence, CONAIE is the Confederation of Indigenous *Nationalities* of Ecuador (Andrade *et al.* 2008, Dávalos 2002).

<sup>26</sup> ECUARUNARI results of the confluence of three political currents: Leftist parties, the progressive Catholic Church (affiliated to the precepts of the Liberation Theology), and autonomous processes inside the indigenous organizations, with the emergence of leaders with accumulated political experience and intellectuals (Simbaña 2009).

Here, the physical geography of the different parts of the country (and hence of indigenous lands) also leads to differentiation within the indigenous movement on environmental (as well as other) issues. Thus, the actual size of the territories in question, as well as their ecological characterisation (e.g. paramos, forests, cultivated lands, degraded soils) varies enormously among the different regions (Dávalos 2002). To provide one telling contrast: the territory of the Waorani nationality in the Amazon, which is the biggest in Ecuador, comprises around 600,000 hectares of continuous tropical rainforest; whereas the territory of Tola Chica community measures only 102.5 hectares of cultivated land intermixed with degraded soils and a lone patch of montane forest.

Adding further complexity, some indigenous territories are officially recognised while others are not. In the cases of both the large Waorani territory and the tiny Tola Chica territory, such official recognition has been given; hence, they are classified as an *ancestral community* protected by the Law of Communes (Republic of Ecuador 1937 [2004]). To be recognized as an ancestral community in this manner is important insofar as this is linked to perceptions about the right to exercise political autonomy and self-determination according to their culture, and including how they might choose to relate to nature (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Art. 57; see also Himley 2009). This is something that is explored throughout the thesis, especially in Chapter 7, but first though, an overview of the indigenous case study site of Tola Chica community is required.

#### **4.3.2 Tola Chica community**

Tola Chica is an indigenous community located 20 kilometres northeast of Quito in the Tumbaco valley along Ilaló Hill (a hill that is at 3,188 meters above sea level). As noted, the community sees itself as part of the Kitu-Kara people, which in turn is part of the Kichwa nation, defined by having Kichwa as a first language and Spanish as a second one. In general, 20 of the 49 ancestral indigenous communities of the Quito area are located at Tumbaco, with 12 of them resident on Ilaló (Institute of the City 2013).

Tumbaco was once known for its fertile lands that, in pre-Hispanic times, produced maize, beans, peanuts, *membrillo*, figs, pepper, and *guayaba*, even as forests covered Ilaló Hill (Bustamante *et al.* 1992). After the Spanish invasion, Tumbaco became an 'indigenous settlement' with its *cacique* (or leader) integrated into the Spanish bureaucracy: this individual then collected taxes and organized indigenous people's labour obligations. Following independence, local haciendas were formed, adjoining

such community territories – and hence dispossessing indigenous peoples of their ancestral lands. It is somehow unclear if the people of Tola Chica was subjected to the slave labour under the dreaded hacienda system like many other communities of the Sierra and of the Amazon, or rather they were ‘free indigenous’ that sold their work to the nearby haciendas (Bustamante *et al.* 1992, see also Chapter 7). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, indigenous communities such as Tola Chica sought to gain official title to their ancestral territories via the Law of Communes of 1937 (Republic of Ecuador 1937 [2004]). Similar to others elsewhere in the country, Tola Chica “has made significant progress in recent decades towards reasserting their territorial authority” (Himley 2009: 834).

Tola Chica was itself thus legally constituted in 1944. The Law defined ‘community’ here as any “populated centre not classified as parish” (Republic of Ecuador 1937 [2004], Art. 1). Such legal recognition was part-and-parcel of the effort to reclaim land for collective ownership (Republic of Ecuador 1937 [2004], Art. 5 and 6). Recently, the 2008 Constitution affirmed this process when it recognized those “communities that have collective property of lands as an ancestral form of territorial organization” (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Art. 60) and hence, the subject of collective rights.

Tola Chica is in this way recognised as one of the ancestral communities of Ilaló Hill, and one seen to have a special spiritual relation to the land (Bustamante *et al.* 1992, Institute of the City 2013). And yet, the Ilaló area is undergoing an intense process of urbanization due to its proximity to Quito as well as the recent construction of Quito’s new international airport to the northeast of Tola Chica. Indeed, since the 1980s, Quito has gradually extended further and further into the local valley system (including Tumbaco) which long served as a key provider of food to the city. Increasingly, though, local indigenous residents, as in Tola Chica who used to be peasants and small-scale farmers, are now urban migrants or local employees (Municipality of Quito 2010). Meanwhile, Tumbaco is fast becoming a commuter suburb of Quito (Institute of the City 2013).

As a result, the pressure to development is high, as private estates, highways and commercial facilities are constructed in a process that has prompted some tensions between indigenous residents and the local government (Institute of the City 2013). In short, the Tola Chica community, as with other indigenous communities living in the Quito area, coexist in a tense sort of space pulled between local values and the draw of development. For our purposes, how the production of communal territory occurs through the selective appropriation of environmental discourse conjoined to the

assertion of an ethnic identity appears crucial – and is something that will notably preoccupy us in Chapter 7.

#### **4.4 Summary**

This chapter has sought to provide the necessary background to the multifaceted Ecuadorian environmentalism that is the main focus of this PhD thesis. Thus, it briefly and selectively explored how the history of colonialism and ethnic relations has shaped how environmental change and degradation has taken place as well as how such change prompted the emergence of a diversified environmentalism in the country which, in this study, is seen to revolve around three main foci: state-related environmental activity, non-governmental environmental action, and local community-based ecologism. It was seen how – ranging from policy-making dynamics to struggles over the effects of natural resource exploitation, Ecuadorian environmentalism has always been a dynamic phenomenon with multiple actors and interests at stake, and with different understandings and approaches to the historical reasons for environmental change as well as key ideas (such as *buen vivir* and the rights of nature or *pachamama*) put forward to regulate such change. All in all, then, the present chapter has set the scene for what follows in the next three empirical chapters. These chapters are broadly arranged according to the three-fold research foci mentioned above. Hence, Chapter 5 accounts for state-linked environmental activity, Chapter 6 tackles non-governmental environmental action, and Chapter 7 addresses local community-based ecologism via a detailed exploration of dynamics in Tola Chica community.

## Chapter 5 The state's environmentalism

Chapter 2 reviewed the political ecology literature on the varieties of environmentalism: ranging from 'technocratic' to 'ecocentric' and 'critical, or popular ecologism' (Guha and Martínez-Alier 1997, Varea and Barrera 1997, Latorre-Tomás 2009, Bebbington and Humphreys-Bebbington 2009). It was suggested that the type of environmentalism deployed by a group of people is related to their conception of nature, which could be primarily technocratic, ecocentric, or social (Castree 2013). Technocratic environmentalism – also labelled as 'mainstream', 'hegemonic', 'neoliberal' or 'market-based' environmentalism, which is also constitutive of 'green capitalism' - has been particularly criticized. The reviewed literature on political ecology delineated the impacts of market-based mechanisms for nature conservation on local communities, mechanisms such as PES, REDD+ and the carbon market (McAfee and Shapiro 2010, Böhm *et al.* 2012, Lohmann 2011, 2014, Asiyanbi 2016). Recent studies, too, have addressed state technocratic environmentalism and its practices in the context of climate change mechanisms attuned towards a decarbonised economy (Brand and Wissen 2013, Apostolopoulou and Adams 2014).

In a similar vein, this Chapter analyses the types of environmentalism deployed by the Ecuadorian State as well as the state's approaches to *buen vivir*, the rights of nature or *pachamama* and territory. The analysis is situated within a particular time and space, namely the Ecuadorian territory of the early 21st century, where there is a declared interest in searching for a new notion of wellbeing or good living (*buen vivir*), an alternative conception of nature and the novel idea of the plurinational territory. The intention of this thesis is to investigate the ways in which the three notions could theoretically and practically frame a different environmentalism that challenges green capitalism. To that end, I begin by analysing the set of state institutions (Taylor 1999, Agnew 2009a) selected for studying the state's environmentalism: the *Programa Socio Bosque* (PSB), the 2008 Constitution and the National Plan for Good Living (PNBV). This definition serves to outline the engagement of the state with green capitalism and the grounds from which it understands *buen vivir* and produces nature and territory.

The chapter begins by describing the PSB, which is the main subject of investigation, *framing* it within the context of the 2008 Constitution and the National Plan for Good Living (*Plan Nacional para el Buen Vivir* or PNBV) as the key documents that present the state's understanding of *buen vivir*<sup>27</sup> and the rights of nature (*pachamama*) and act as reference for their implementation at policy level. A comprehensive analysis of the

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<sup>27</sup> The term *buen vivir* is used instead of *sumak kawsay* as it is the term most widely used in official documents; translations and interpretations of *sumak kawsay* are found to be erratic, conflictive and contested.

Constitution, the PNBV and the PSB key documents is then conducted to draw an image of a state environmentalism that has refashioned *buen vivir* to mean the sustainable development concept, which is central to technocratic environmentalism. Similarly, an analysis of the rights of nature explores how this idea has been transformed into a form of scientific administration of nature, detached from an approach to nature attuned to *pachamama* conception. The closer analysis of the PSB documents that comes next, provides an illustration of technocratic environmentalism in operation. The chapter then focuses on how the PSB produces nature under capitalism, the nature that is treated as the subject of rights; either the right of being conserved untouched by human action, or the right of being scientifically managed for development, in effect, to be exploited. Non-human nature is also produced as an “accumulation strategy” (Smith 2007) for future capitalist markets. The final section of the chapter addresses how the PSB contributes to an ordering of the national space concurrently with technocratic environmentalism in an effort to produce nature “all the way down” (Castree 2003: 282) either for green markets or for conventional, fossil fuels dependant markets.

The discussion here of the state’s practices thus sets the scene for my investigation of other Ecuadorian environmentalisms contained in alternative social understandings of nature, *buen vivir* and territory, as well as practices of forest conservation, pursued by non-state environmental actors (in Chapter 6); and in the multifaceted social and environmental praxis of a local indigenous community (in Chapter 7 and as exemplified by the case of the Tola Chica community).

## **5.1 The *Programa Socio Bosque***

Chapters 3 and 4 briefly introduced the *Programa Socio Bosque* (PSB), as well as the reasons underpinning its selection as a mechanism which is representative of state environmentalism, particularly in that it conforms with the last generation of domestic forest conservation mechanisms that were influenced by the global trend of conservation strategies promoted by neoliberal environmentalism. Indeed, the PSB delivers an economic incentive – a fixed amount of money - directly to the bank accounts of landowners who voluntarily commit to conserve forests, paramos and other vegetation types within their properties. As part of the implementation process the PSB must follow the mandate of the Constitution and the National Plan for Good Living (PNBV), which are responsible for mainstreaming the new notions of *buen vivir* and the rights of nature into public policy. However, as we shall see below, neither the PSB’s officers nor its documents refer to the notions under analysis to any significant extent.



Rather, environmental policymaking rapidly replaced them by the widespread terms of sustainable development. Consequently, an analysis of the Constitution and the PNBV was needed in order to trace how the state is using *buen vivir* and the rights of nature in environmental-related practice. In what follows I introduce the main features of the PSB, the Constitution and the PNBV, to then explore in more detail how they had institutionalized the terms.

### **5.1.1 Origins and main achievements of the PSB**

In 2008, the Ecuadorian State declared that deforestation reduction was one of its top priorities and thus created the PSB<sup>28</sup> precisely to this end. The programme is a state-funded, nation-wide programme that was officially conceived to: (1) tackle the high national deforestation rate estimated at around 70,000 hectares per annum; (2) reduce the associated greenhouse gas emissions<sup>29</sup>; and (3) reduce poverty (Ministry of Environment, 2012b). It was created for the sole purpose of conserving *natural* ecosystems, but since 2009 it has included incentives for reforestation and ecological restoration; further, since 2011 it has included incentives for sustainable forestry management, as well as the sustainable production and trade of biodiversity related and non-timber forest products (MA #131, 19/Dec/2013, Art. 1). The combined aims of nature protection and poverty alleviation by means of comprehensive environmental management is at the core of the technocratic environmentalism which, recently, has introduced mechanisms for conservation mediated by money.

In regard to the latter procedure, the PSB delivers an economic incentive – a fixed amount of money - directly to the bank accounts of landowners who voluntarily commit to conserving forests, paramos and other vegetation types within their properties. The participants can be local and indigenous communes or communities (i.e. collective participants) or they can be individual landowners; in all cases, they must apply to become “partners” of the programme. Their compliance in terms of conserving the specified ecosystems is framed by a Conservation Agreement of 20 years’ duration, which establishes the conservation duties of the landowners (MA #169, 14/Nov/2008; MA #115, 12/Nov/2009).

During its early years, the PSB was under the remit of the National Secretariat of Planning for Development (*Secretaría Nacional de Planificación para el Desarrollo*,

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<sup>28</sup> An internal document of the National Secretariat of Planning and Development: SENPLADES-SIP-dap-2008-21, 2/JUL/2008.

<sup>29</sup> According to the National Inventory of Greenhouse Emissions, Ecuador emits annually 410 million tons of carbon dioxide. Emissions rose by 54.6% between 1990 and 2006, mainly due to changes in land use (Ministry of Environment 2011b: 8).

SENPLADES) as a development programme, which was important because this placement gave it administrative and financial independence from the official bureaucracy and, linked to this, enabled the PSB to conduct rapid operations in the field (Government officer 1, 2013). Today, the programme continues to retain some level of independence, although it has been part of the Ministry of Environment since 2011 (SOM-PB 2012, Art. 7.1).

The successive changes are reflected in the Ministerial Agreements (MA) issued by the Ministry of Environment that define the Programme's structure and actions. Starting in 2008, there was a steady stream of MAs being published. The first one was issued in November 2008 and indeed created the PSB while establishing its objectives (MA #169, 14/Nov/2008). All subsequent MAs were Operative Manuals (OM), which defined the specific functioning of the programme (i.e. the criteria employed to select the areas to protect, the type of beneficiaries, the structure of the incentive, the administrative procedure by which to become a beneficiary or 'partner', and the specifications of the Conservation Agreements). The first Operative Manual was issued in December 2008 (MA #177, 3/Dec/2008) and was modified one year later in November 2009 (MA #115, 12/Nov/2009). Subsequent modifications were introduced to include as beneficiaries land owners who resided inside the national system of protected areas (MA #042, 26/Mar/2010), to define the legal obligations of the programme National Director (MA #007, 26/Jan/2011), to update the structure of the economic incentive scheme (MA #130, 28/Jul/2011) and to include incentives specifically for ecological restoration (MA #092, 12/Jul/2012). In 2012, a Synthesised Operative Manual (SOM) was produced that consolidated all previous manuals into one document (SOM PB 2012).

Subsequently, another MA marked the transformation of the PSB from 'Project Socio Bosque' to the 'National Programme of Incentives for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Natural Patrimony Socio Bosque' and was expanded to include new incentives for conservation, reforestation, ecological restoration, sustainable forestry and bio-trade (MA #131, 19/Dec/2013). This rapid-fire evolution of the PSB, which in just six years evolved from a minor project designed only to deliver incentives for forest conservation to a national programme delivering incentives for almost any action related to forestry, reveals the growing importance being attached to diverse market-based mechanisms in Ecuadorian environmental governance. This process is closely related to the evolution, in turn, of environmental administration and policy-making in Ecuador, influenced importantly by BINGOs (Big International NGOs) as well as by local NGOs adhering to a neoliberal approach (see Chapter 4).

The PSB is presented as a major success in Ecuadorian environmental management (Fenton 2010, European Commission 2013). By 2015, it had enrolled 2,748 participants (be they individual or collective partners) covering 1,489,541 hectares of forest and paramos, some 5.25% of Ecuador's territory (Programa Socio Bosque 2015). The amount of incentives delivered to the partners totalled US \$7,112,589.69 in 2012<sup>30</sup> (Ministry of Environment 2012a) rising to US \$10,405,721.80 in 2015 (Programa Socio Bosque 2015). The funds going to community organisations are notably used for local economic development as well as to strengthen these organisations.

According to PSB reports, by 2013 the funds were utilised in four main activities. First, 33% of the money was used in the construction of infrastructure, including houses and facilities related to health and education, and in covering the wages of teachers and nurses. Second, 25% was utilised in the administration of the collective organisations. Another 20% was used for economic development that generated income locally (such as tourism, sustainable agriculture and livestock rearing, the production and trade of handicrafts, and community banks). Finally, 22% of the funds were used for local conservation as well as territorial 'consolidation' through such things as the resolution of territorial conflicts, the legalization of land tenure, the payment of forest rangers, and road and trail maintenance (Ministry of Environment 2012c). Meanwhile, individual partners in the scheme spent 42% on domestic consumption, 27% in the conservation of the area, 24% on savings and investments, and 7% on debt repayment (Ministry of Environment 2013c).

Official documentation reports an increment of 278% in the number of Conservation Agreements signed between 2008 and 2012, which means an increase of more than 500% in the number of hectares of land incorporated within the programme (Ministry of Environment 2012a). The PSB went from representing only 2% of the total national protected area in 2008 to 12% in 2012, as shown in Figure 5.1.

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<sup>30</sup> For the purpose of comparison, in the years 2007-2012, the current government invested more than US \$18,358 million, which could represent US \$3,059 million annually (SENPLADES 2013: 416).

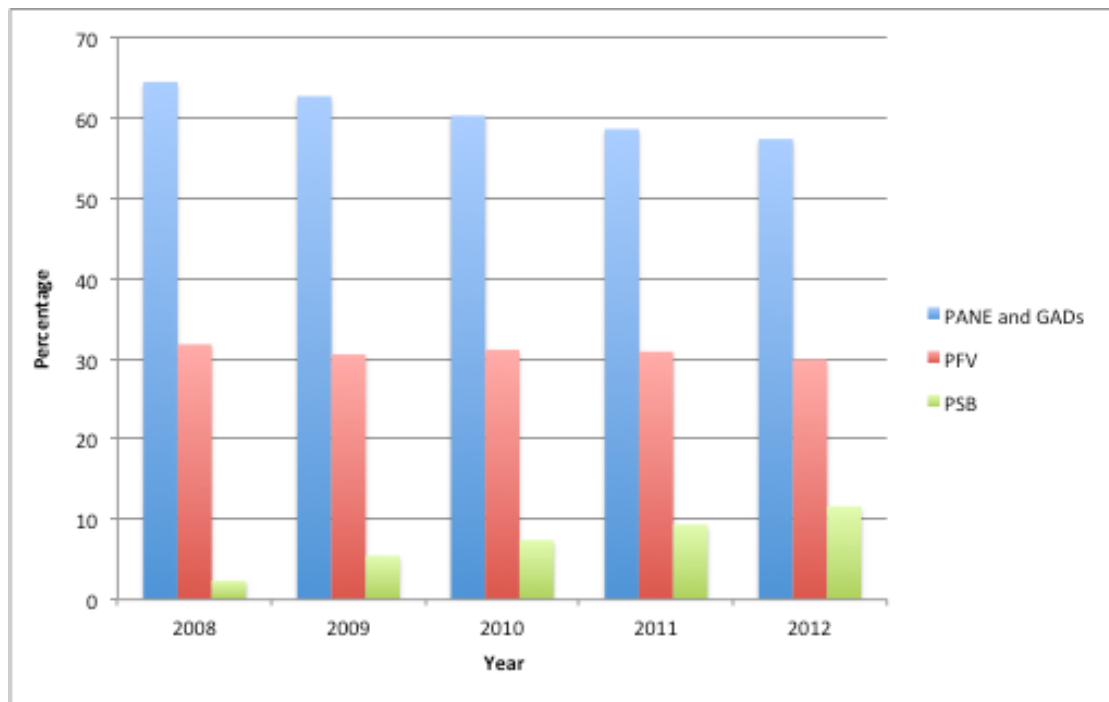


Figure 5.1 Contribution of different categories of protection to the increment of the percentage of area under formal conservation or environmental management between 2008 and 2012.

PANE: Patrimony of National Protected Areas; GADs: Protected areas of local governments; PFV: Protected forest and vegetation. Source: SENPLADES 2013: 223.

Hence the programme has also certainly helped the state to meet the goal of increasing the area under formal conservation or environmental management – from 19% of the national territory in 2008 to more than 30% in 2013. Indeed, the goal was to have 24% of the territory conserved or actively managed by 2013, meaning that this goal was in fact exceeded (SENPLADES 2009: 242, see also SENPLADES 2013). The target was formulated within the National Plan for Good Living (PNBV), which, as has already been mentioned, is the governmental document that expressed the government's ideology and institutionalised *buen vivir* and the rights of nature as first set out in the 2008 Constitution. The main features of both documents are described next in order to frame the analysis of state-linked environmentalism.

### 5.1.2 Framing the PSB: The PNBV and the Constitution

The 2008 Constitution is the 18<sup>th</sup> in the country's history and is important because it reflected a promise made by President Rafael Correa during his 2006 presidential campaign; as such, and as soon as he was elected, he announced democratic elections to select the 130 members of the Asamblea Nacional Constituyente (ANC, National Constituent Assembly) in September 2007. The ANC thereafter re-wrote the Constitution between December 2007 and July 2008. During those eight months, the

ANC received delegations and proposals from diverse groups across the nation, which permitted the political input of diverse sectors in society including groups such as indigenous peoples, environmentalists and women habitually ignored in the past (SENPLADES 2013). As Chapter 6 discusses, this more socially-inclusive approach is assumed to have permitted the recognition of the rights of nature and the introduction of the notion of good living (NGO member 24, 2013; NGO member 11, 2013). The new Constitution was approved by a National Referendum in September 2008, and achieved a 64% show of support (SENPLADES 2013).

The outcome was quite innovative. Thus, this Constitution<sup>31</sup> was the first national supreme law in the world to grant rights specifically to nature (Republic of Ecuador 2008, SENPLADES 2009, Acosta and Martínez 2011). It also postulated a new political regime framed by the idea of *buen vivir* defined as to *live in harmony with nature* (see the Preamble to Republic of Ecuador 2008). Below, I discuss in more detail how the conceptions of ‘harmony with nature’ and the rights of nature took shape in the constitutional text.

In turn, the National Plan for Good Living (PNBV) is a comprehensive document that describes official ideology as well as setting out the public budget (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Art. 280). The PNBV has been responsible for mainstreaming the notions of *buen vivir* and the rights of nature into public policy. The preparation of the PNBV became the responsibility of the National Secretariat of Planning and Development (SENPLADES), which produces it every four years. This agency was created in 2006 to manage all planning for development in coordination with local government and the president's office (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Art. 279). The rules and regulations set out in the PNBV are compulsory for public institutions, while they are viewed as providing guidance for the private sector. Thus, the PNBV is defined as:

[...] the instrument to which the public policies, programmes and projects are bound; [that organises] the planning and execution of the state's General Budget; the investments and allocation of public funds; and the coordination of the National State and local government's competencies (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Art. 280).

The PNBV is hence a powerful instrument that distributes funds according to the fulfilment of performance goals – viz., “*buen vivir* objectives” (SENPLADES 2009: 17). In this endeavour, the Plan seems to follow the “Logical Framework Approach” designed by the World Bank and used widely by international organisations: thus, it has a set of development objectives to be achieved through programmes and projects,

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<sup>31</sup> Official Registry #449, 20/Oct/2008.

whose performance is measured by quantitative indicators, monitored by SENPLADES (SENPLADES 2007, 2009, 2013). In this regard, the PSB is thought to contribute to Objective 7: “to guarantee the rights of nature and to promote environmental sustainability” (SENPLADES 2013: 222). Indeed, as with other public policies, the PSB is articulated to the PNBV, as the PSB National Director explained:

[T]he PNBV binds us; we have to meet the goals of the Plan [...], so we are completely articulated. [The goals] are our North [i.e. as on a compass] and also, through them, we are evaluated permanently. SENPLADES evaluates how the goals and the planning are achieved. [...] In the field, in the everyday practice, our technicians [...] present the PSB [to the people] as a national governmental programme framed by the PNBV (Government officer 1, 2013).

Clearly, then, SENPLADES is a key agency leading the state's quest to promote environment protection and development in a purportedly new way. As part of its role, it has produced three major planning documents since its creation in 2006: the National Plan for Development 2007-2010 (SENPLADES 2007); the National Development Plan/National Plan for Good Living 2009-2013 (SENPLADES 2009, 2013); and the National Development Plan/National Plan for Good Living 2013-2017, which (significantly) included the subtitle *Todo el mundo mejor* ('Everybody better'). Changing titles here are important insofar as they shed light on changes to the official vision of *buen vivir*, notably from a post-election starting point at which time *buen vivir* was put forward to challenge narrow notions of development equated with economic growth while promoting a new regime of human-nature relationship, to the idea that economic growth and the scientific management of the nation's rich natural resources were essential if Ecuador's poorest citizens were to be helped. The following discussion assesses this discursive shift and its ramifications.

## 5.2 The state's environmentalism

The state's environmentalism is assessed in this section through analysing the 2008 Constitution, the three versions of the National Plan for Good Living, PNBV (SENPLADES 2007, 2009, 2013) and the PSB. As already noted, the information I gathered from interviews with government officers as well from an examination of PSB documents, gave a clear indication that there had been a shift back to a previous technocratic environmental rationality – if we assume that there was indeed a shift forward. So while *buen vivir* had become synonymous with sustainable development, the *rights of nature* are thought to represent the nature's limit to such development. It seems that the new ideas were constrained by the sustainable development concept paradigm, and could only in this way be integrated into public policy. Next, I will analyse those features to draw a picture of state-linked environmentalism related to the

spheres under analysis: the Constitution, the national planning and the *Programa Socio Bosque*.

### 5.2.1 *Buen vivir* as sustainable development

The fieldwork that I conducted in Ecuador reveals that, even though *buen vivir* was at first presented as a critique of conventional development, including its sustainable version, over time the process of public policy-making has reverted to an old and already-known version of development (Indigenous representative 1, 2012; NGO member 2, 2013; NGO member 4, 2013; NGO member 13, 2013). To start with, the term *sumak kawsay* (in the *Kichwa* language) was simply translated as *buen vivir* in official documentation and legislation. But, according to some interviewees, *buen vivir* is reductionist in that it fails to “apprehend at all what *sumak kawsay* means” (NGO member 15, 2013; Indigenous representative 1, 2012). Government documents swiftly excluded the *Kichwa* term in favour of its Spanish ‘equivalent’. For example, the 2009-2013 PNBV mentions *sumak kawsay* just five times across its 520 pages, while the 2013-2017 PNBV mentions it only six times (SENPLADES 2009, 2013). In contrast, *buen vivir* is used extensively across these documents. It is, thus, *buen vivir* the term I will use too in the following discussion given my focus on state-linked environmentalism.

My fieldwork also found that the early epistemic dispute in connection with use of the term *buen vivir* (which for a time had led to some confrontation between the government and its supporters on the one side and those in the social movements sector in the political opposition on the other) has also tended to dissipate over time (NGO member 20, 2012; NGO member 25, 2013). For some critical thinkers, this is a good thing, as that dispute had only served to distract indigenous organisations from much more important discussions about the plurinational state and need to criticize the capitalist mode of production; for them, it might even have been one of the reasons underlying the indigenous organisations’ growing political weakness (Indigenous representative 3, 2013; Scholar 6, 2013; NGO member 16, 2013). However, at least in the public realm, indigenous leaders such as the presidents of CONAIE and ECUARUNARI still assumed *buen vivir* to be pivotal in the defence of collective indigenous rights and the plurinational state (Cholango 2012, Pérez 2013). In contrast, though, the *buen vivir* debate is quite absent from both state and non-state environmentalist discourses – with the notable exception of two environmental NGOs considered in some detail in this thesis as well as by other environmental activists that are close to the indigenous movement (NGO member 7, 2013; NGO member 11, 2013;

NGO member 14, 2012; NGO member 20, 2012; NGO member 24, 2013; Government officer 1, 2013; Government officer 2, 2013; see also Chapter 6).

In any case, the wording of the 2008 Constitution seems to glide above this sort of political machination; hence, it begins with a rather impressive affirmation:

We, the citizens of Ecuador [...] decide to construct a new form of civil coexistence, in diversity and harmony with nature to achieve the *buen vivir*, the *sumak kawsay* (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Preamble).

The *buen vivir* regime, at least as set out in the Constitution, was thus widely seen to be a response to the historical struggles of the indigenous movement and the demands in general of historically-excluded subjects in the capitalist system (Larrea 2013, see also Scholar 10, 2013; NGO member 1, 2012). For many, the constitutional text represented a vital critique of the linear understanding of development as economic growth and material accumulation widely disseminated in global development (Falconí 2013, Acosta 2013b, see also Indigenous representative 2, 2013); it was instead a vision from the Andean-Amazon indigenous peoples that, according to Ana María Larrea, Sub-secretariat of SENPLADES, was mainstreamed into public policy as part of the “construction of contra-hegemony” (Larrea 2013).

But then consider next how this stirring vision was articulated in the planning process. Here is what the PNBV 2009-2013 had to say:

*Buen vivir* is a proposal of change [...] to set in practice a wider vision that overcomes the narrow quantitative borders of economism, which allows the application of a new economic paradigm whose aim is not the material, mechanical and endless accumulation of goods, but one that promotes an inclusive, sustainable and democratic economy. Namely, a vision that incorporates the actors that historically have been excluded of the logics of the capitalist market, as well as those forms of production and reproduction based on principles other than those of the market logic, to the processes of accumulation and (re)distribution (SENPLADES 2009: 10).

This passage clearly configures *buen vivir* as part of a distributive (or reformed) capitalist economy in which historically-excluded actors are incorporated into the process of capitalist accumulation. Despite 'decrying' endless capitalist accumulation, official documents may situate *buen vivir* as an alternative to neoliberalism, but not necessarily to capitalism itself. But this is still painted as a victory for anti-neoliberal indigenous movements and Leftist organisations:

More than a novelty of the new Constitution, *buen vivir* is the outcome of a large quest for new life models, boosted particularly by Latin America social movements and organizations during the last decades, as part of their claims against the neoliberal economic model (SENPLADES 2009: 43).

The National Plan for Good Living goes on to extend the definition of good living to embrace ideas of love, peace, harmony with nature, access to free time for



contemplation and emancipation, freedom as individuals and responsibility within a collective, the necessity of reciprocity, and mutual recognition and respect of cultural differences (SENPLADES 2009). However, the actual planning documents set a pathway for an economic transformation that is reminiscent of proposals for industrial development of the 1960s and 1970s led by ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean):

The *buen vivir* society [...] proposes the redefinition of the socio economic formation and its institutional constraints for the transition from a primary-producer economy to a high value-added economy, through the permanent creation of knowledge as well as technological and social innovation. The aim of this strategy is to pass from a finite resources economy to an economy based upon infinite resources through the scientific, economic and industrial appropriation of knowledge (SENPLADES 2013: 62).

Hence, *buen vivir*, as incorporated into the realm of public policy, does not challenge either the centrality of the economy in social life or the perceived necessity of economic growth.

Similarly, a closer analysis of the Constitution shows that *buen vivir* re-organises the social welfare system of the state but not the economic system itself, which continues to be guided by capitalism and the associated quest for economic growth. For example, the economic and social spheres are divided into two different chapters of the constitutional text, the 'development regime' and the '*buen vivir* regime':

- The development regime refers to the economic policies and the administration of the strategic sectors<sup>32</sup>, agriculture and food production, and regulates the forms of production, the types of property, the labour and the markets (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Chapter 6).
- The *buen vivir* regime commands the social welfare sector (education, health, social security, culture, communication and information, housing, population and migration, transportation, science and technology promotion) and the environmental policies to minimise the environmental impacts of the development model, the conservation of nature, and the promotion of sustainability (renewable energies and sustainable human settlements) (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Chapter 7).

Hence, *buen vivir* comes to be the regime focused on human rights and social welfare (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Chapter 2: Rights of *buen vivir*, also Arts. 85, 97, 275, 290,

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<sup>32</sup> Energy, communications, non-renewable natural resources, transportation, biodiversity and genetic patrimony, radio spectrum, and water are controlled exclusively by the state (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Art. 313).

319). Meanwhile, *development* continues to organise the economic and political spheres and it remains the ultimate goal of the state to guarantee those rights (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Art. 284: Economic system and economic policy; Art. 304: Commercial policy; cf. Art. 283).

The persistence of development certainly contradicts the idea of *buen vivir* as a post-development alternative, as it was once presented in the rhetoric of the new government (NGO member 24, 2013; Scholar 10, 2013). For example, the Secretary of SENPLADES at the time I conducted fieldwork, referred to *buen vivir* as a decolonial term that challenges the “conventional ideas of the North” (Falconí 2013). However, the potency of the term is then obscured by the presentation of *buen vivir* as “an idea in permanent construction and re-signification in accordance with everyday political praxis” (Larrea 2013). For some, this transforms *buen vivir* into a term “that can be anything” (NGO member 20, 2012) as it is “merely a declaration” (NGO member 24, 2013) or, more crudely, “the absence of [any concrete] political proposal” for meaningful change (Indigenous representative 3, 2013). It is, rather, a refashioned form of development that comprises a set of reformist public policies with new elements of an enhanced (if still modest) re-distribution of wealth, recognition of cultural diversity and a mandate to attain sustainable development (NGO member 24, 2013; Scholar 7, 2014; Government officer 2, 2013). But sustainable development, firmly rooted in technocratic environmentalism, is related to an idea of nature supported, and not challenged, by the notion of the rights of nature and of *buen vivir* as “to live in harmony with nature”.

### **5.2.2 The rights of nature as scientific administration of nature**

Critical scholars and environmentalists claim that Ecuador’s recognition of nature as the *subject* of rights is a shift towards a bio-centric political regime in which humans belong to nature rather than master it (Gudynas 2009, 2015, Velázquez-Gutiérrez 2014), recognizing the essential interconnection and interdependence between humans and the surrounding world, as from a critical ecologism or popular ecologism perspective; therefore, it follows that the rights of nature should also contain human rights (NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 24, 2013). Moreover, it is interpreted as a turning point in environmental governance; a political intention to re-think the human/nature relationship by ‘looking back’ to ancestral indigenous thought (NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 28, 2013; NGO member 25 1, 2013). However, empirical research undertaken for this thesis reveals that the way in which the rights of nature has been officially deployed has only contributed to a separation between

humans and nature insofar as it has supported the idea of *non-human* nature being the sole subject of rights and, simultaneously the object of scientific management.

Under the 2008 Constitution, nature has the right to: (1) have its existence respected; (2) be restored after a disturbance; and (3) be protected by the precautionary principle (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Arts. 71-73). The fourth right is actually a human right: that of humans reaping the benefits of “the environmental and natural richness” (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Art. 74). To better understand why the Ecuadorian Constitution granted these and not other rights to nature, it is important to note that these rights were incorporated in the Constitution precisely as a tool by which to struggle against the extractive industries, which had long been one of the main concerns of environmentalists in the country (NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 20, 2012; NGO member 24, 2013). According to many interviewees, this understanding of the notion was originally put forward by an environmental NGO that worked with indigenous peoples of the Southern Amazon in developing alternatives to oil extraction (Government officer 2, 2013; NGO member 1, 2013; NGO member 11; NGO member 12, 2013; NGO member 13, 2013; see Chapter 6). Indeed, oil extraction there had resulted in significant socio-environmental impacts that had prompted, in turn, the foundation of the environmental movement in the country that belongs to the “popular ecologism” strand (see Chapter 4 and also the analysis in Chapter 6).

The constitutional text reflects such a preoccupation: of the four articles referring to the rights of nature, two are related to the negative impacts of natural resource extraction (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Arts. 72 and 73). In an effort to prevent them, Article 73 addresses “activities that could lead to species extinction, ecosystems destruction, or permanent alteration of *natural* cycles” (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Art. 73, third paragraph; emphasis added). Here, and despite claims that the rights of nature challenges the dichotomy between humans and nature, the Constitution in fact reinforces a non-human nature that prevails across the government offices and is reflected in official documentation: devoid of humans, nature is defined as ecosystems, species and natural cycles. Moreover, alienated from humans in this manner, nature is recognised as an entity that has the right of being preserved and restored but, at the same time, nature needs to be used for *buen vivir*.

The paradox of protecting nature from disturbance-linked activities and simultaneously having to use nature for *buen vivir* is resolved by referring to the concept of sustainable development, which it is believed harmonises development with nature conservation and is located at the core of technocratic environmentalism beliefs. Certainly, if we

acknowledge that *buen vivir* has indeed been refashioned into development with elements of environmental sustainability simply added into the mix (section 5.2.1), the phrase “in harmony with nature” can be seen as being synonymous with sustainable development (NGO member 22, 2013; NGO member 23, 2013). Indeed, reference to the classical definition of sustainable development is ubiquitous throughout the government documents under analysis here: hence, the perceived equilibrium between the economic, environmental and social spheres; also the asserted possibility of meeting human development needs while still conserving nature. Not surprisingly, for those environmentalists who moved from the NGO sector into working for state agencies, *buen vivir* was promptly refashioned into sustainable development (Government officer 1, 2013; Government officer 3, 2013).

For example, the Constitution describes the economic model as one that will “tend to a dynamic and balanced relation between society, the state, and the market in harmony with nature” (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Art. 283). In so doing, the state will promote natural resources use prioritising “intergenerational responsibility, nature conservation [...], and will minimize the negative environmental, social and economic impacts” (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Art. 317; also NGO member 22, 2013; NGO member 23, 2013; Government officer 3, 2013). All these terms are central to the classic definition of sustainable development. Accordingly, the PNBV dedicates an entire development objective – Objective 7 – to “guarantee the rights of nature *and* to promote environmental sustainability” (SENPLADES 2013: 222; emphasis added). Here, the twofold goal of conserving non-human nature and permitting economic growth through the mitigation of any negative impacts it provokes once again alludes to the sustainable development concept.

The goals set for Objective 7 follow the same trend (Table 5.1). Of the six goals of Objective 7 established in the 2013-2017 PNBV, four aim to increase Ecuador’s area of national territory under conservation or environmental management (SENPLADES 2013: 242, Goals 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4) while two aim to control pollution (SENPLADES 2013: 242, Goals 7.5 and 7.6).

Table 5.1 Goals of Objective 7: Guaranteeing the rights of nature and promoting environmental sustainability

Goal	Quantitative target
7.1 To increase the proportion of national territory under conservation or environmental management (%)	35.9
7.2 To increase the national marine area under conservation of environmental management (hectares)	817,000
7.3 To increase the area of forest restoration (hectares)	300,000
7.4 To increase the national biocapacity (global hectares per capita)	2.50
7.5 To increase the percentage of oil industry-polluting sources removed, remediated or registered by the National Environmental Authority (%)	60
7.6 To increase the percentage of households that classify [i.e. depose properly of] waste (%)	32-45

Source: SENPLADES 2013: 535.

Hence, guaranteeing the rights of nature is taken as meaning the need to expand non-human nature conservation through natural reserve protection and creation, while promoting environmental sustainability involves the control of pollution by the scientific administration of the impacts of development from a techno-optimist approach. Indeed, taken together, the ideas of the rights of nature and *buen vivir* being “in harmony with nature” boost another familiar element of the sustainable development concept: the need for science. Both the Constitution and the PNBV thus aim for “planning for habitat preservation, efficient resource management, integral restoration and the institution of life systems in harmony with nature” (SENPLADES 2013: 222) that will “effectively prevent and control pollution, recover natural degraded spaces and [facilitate the] sustainable management of natural resources” (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Art. 397, Paragraph 2). All of these elements require a central role for science.

Indeed, the scientific administration of nature in order to reduce the impacts of *unavoidable* and *unchallenged* development is central to SENPLADES’ definition of society “in harmony with nature”:

The functioning of the economy may minimize the environmental and social impacts of its productive and industrial activities. For that, [the society] should plan considering the local territories’ characteristics [...] reducing and controlling extractive activities. It must, too, prioritise an eco-efficient use of material and energy resources through the application of technologies that enable the ecosystems’ integrity (SENPLADES 2013: 26).

Aiming to exploit natural resources for development in balance with nature conservation through the scientific administration of nature likewise guides the actions of the Ministry of Environment and, by extension, the PSB (see section 5.3). For example, the institutional aim of Ecuador’s Ministry of Environment is:

[To] ensure a *sustainable model of development*, environmentally balanced and respectful of cultural diversity that preserves the biodiversity and the natural

regeneration capacity of ecosystems, and ensure[s] the satisfaction of the needs of present and future generations (Ministry of Environment 2014; emphasis added).

Interestingly, allusions to the rights of nature or *buen vivir* are absent from the above statement and from the following, which is the institutional mission of the Ministry of Environment:

To exercise effectively and efficiently environmental management, ensuring a harmonious relationship between economic, social, and environmental spheres, which ensures [the] *sustainable management of strategic natural resources* (Ministry of Environment 2014; emphasis added).

It appears, then, that government officers working in environmentally-linked institutions are still more comfortable with terminology relating to the sustainable development concept than with *buen vivir* or rights of nature. However, the Ministry does aim “to ensure that Ecuador uses sustainably its strategic natural resources, to achieve good living” (Ministry of Environment 2016; emphasis added).

In summary, as *buen vivir* has been refashioned into a familiar version of sustainable development, official deployment of the notion of the rights of nature helps to maintain nature *outside* of the human realm while also affirming the need for the scientific administration of nature to support such development. Having explored these general conceptual articulations and manipulations, the next section will focus on the PSB and its connections to them.

### **5.2.3 Technocratic environmentalism in operation**

In what follows, the discussion explores how the PSB has refashioned *buen vivir* as sustainable development principally through two means: one that places the responsibility for ecological degradation onto Ecuador’s poorest population, and the other that specifies that nature conservation can – and indeed must - coexist with development through the scientific administration of nature.

Those ideas were inherited from the technocratic BINGOs (Big International non governmental organizations) and local NGOs that strongly influenced environmental governance until 2008 (see Chapter 4). Indeed, the PSB has its origins in conservation projects begun in 2005 by the United States-based NGO Conservation International (CI) and the German Technical Cooperation (GIZ) (Ministry of Environment 2012a). Notable here was the technocratic and market-based oriented project ‘Gran Reserva Chachi’ which had aimed to conserve 7,200 hectares of humid forest in north-west Ecuador in exchange for an annual payment of US \$5 per hectare, and which was based on ‘Conservation Agreements’ between CI/GIZ and local indigenous communities whereby money was only transferred to the communities after

independent verification of compliance. This payment sought to compete with the 'opportunity costs' of logging and, according to CI, the funds were invested in community businesses, infrastructure, tap water, medical assistance, education, and management of the nature reserve (Conservation International 2010, de Koning *et al.* 2011).

PSB documents certainly acknowledge the influence of CI in the creation and design of the programme:

[T]he government of the Citizen's Revolution<sup>33</sup> identifies conservation as a real and indispensable strategic investment for the State and its citizens. This is evident through the success of local experiences like the Gran Chachi Reserve [...], driven by Conservation International and the German Technical Cooperation (Ministry of Environment 2012a: 2).

However, continues the document, the Ministry of Environment "created the PSB to complement the national development goals to reduce the deforestation rates as part of a good governance of the forestry sector" (Ministry of Environment 2012a: 4), which appears to be an attempt to downplay CI's influence in the creation of the programme. It was suggested by a number of interviewees that this reflected a calculated attempt by President Correa's government to reduce the role of NGOs in the country in general (NGO member 2, 2013; NGO member 6, 2013; NGO member 9, 2013; NGO member 10, 2013; see also Chapter 6). As one NGO member explained:

[...] many people have gone to work for the government. The participation in [society by] NGOs is [subsequently] devaluated, because [the government] says that we do not represent anyone. There is also less funding available. [Meanwhile, for environmentalists and the like] there is no interest in confronting the state because it is the main employer now; many people are afraid of not being hired (NGO member 2, 2012).

And yet, NGO influence lingers on and so does the kind of technocratic environmentalism they deployed. Thus, although the state may have reduced the day-to-day influence of NGOs, the neoliberal conservation ideology nonetheless originated with mainstream transnational conservation agencies; indeed, this philosophy was transferred to the public sector when experts previously employed by NGOs were appointed. In particular, those government officers who created, designed and at present administer the PSB are professionals skilled in terms of a neoliberal environmental rationality and associated technical tools acquired as a result of having worked for mainstream NGOs (Government officer 1, 2013; NGO member 13, 2013).

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<sup>33</sup> 'Citizens Revolution' was the slogan of President Correa's regime.

So, although *buen vivir* is often routinely referred to in the introductory sections of the PSB documents under analysis, it is not discussed among government officers working in the environmental sector. For example, the preamble of the Ministerial Agreements invariably begins with the following:

The Ecuadorian State has the responsibility to fight poverty, to promote sustainable development and to protect the natural patrimony of the country. [...] The population has the right to live in a safe and ecologically balanced environment that guarantees the sustainability and *buen vivir*, *sumak kawsay* (MA #169, 14/Nov/2008 Paragraphs 1 and 2; but see also MA #177, 3/Dec/2008; MA #115, 12/Nov/2009; MA #131, 19/Dec/2013).

Here, sustainable development is entangled with *buen vivir* and, although the documents maintain the rhetorical tone of novelty found in the Constitution, they do not abandon standard sustainable development language either. Similarly, in the introduction to a widely distributed leaflet (sent to key stakeholders, partner communities and prospective new participants) prepared to mark the first four years of the PSB, *buen vivir* appears as a consequence of the scientific management of nature and a prerequisite of development:

In the Constitution, Nature was recognised for the first time as [the] subject of Rights, while its conservation, sustainable use and restoration were specified as mandatory; all of this is part of *Sumak Kawsay* or good living for the development of Ecuadorian society (Ministry of Environment 2012a: 3; capital letters in the source).

Having referred to *buen vivir*, the PSB documents return to the sustainable development language, while deeper reflections and debates about *buen vivir* occur mostly amongst SENPLADES heads (Falconi 2013, Larrea 2013) and employees (Government officer 2, 2013; Government officer 3, 2013). For example, the PSB National Director readily admitted to me “to not having thought much about *buen vivir*” while, when they speak to potential beneficiaries, “[*buen vivir*] is merely our context; we present it and we say that we are articulated to it but after that we begin to work, to socialise the programme” (Government officer 1, 2013). Something similar is found in the myriad of documents produced by the Ministry of Environment such that *buen vivir* usually only amounts to the odd paraphrase taken from the Constitution and the PNBV<sup>34</sup>.

Thus far, environmentalists working in government do not hesitate to present *buen vivir* and sustainable development as synonymous, although the first would be seen to be an improved form of sustainable development in that it takes seriously the matter of

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<sup>34</sup> To cite but a few documents: Strategic Planning of the Ministry of Environment 2010-2014 (Ministry of Environment 2010), Forestry Governance in Ecuador (Ministry of Environment 2011), Guide of Procedures for [Socio Bosque Program] Partners in the Event of Aggression Against their Properties (Ministry of Environment 2012) and Systematization of Socio Bosque (Ministry of Environment 2012).



cultural diversity (Government officer 1, 2013; Government officer 2, 2013; Government officer 6, 2014). Although for government officers *buen vivir* might challenge the *inevitability* of economic growth to attain sustainability, the growth determinant is nonetheless not really abandoned in policy-making practice either (Government officer 1, 2013; Government officer 3, 2013). On the contrary, economic growth is assumed to be the main element required to transcend income inequality *for* sustainable development. Accordingly, the PSB emerged as an instrument through which to distribute state revenues to the poorest populations while at the same time advancing the cause of environmental sustainability (Government officer 1, 2013; Government officer 2, 2013).

As such, government employees seem to be more comfortable and accustomed to the sustainable development concept, which provides a much more comprehensive body of (internationally-sanctioned) knowledge and tools for governing natural resource use and environmental policy-making than does *buen vivir* (Government officer 3, 2013; NGO member 12, 2013). This is due, in part, to the fact that the former has been around a lot longer than the latter in policy-making circles, but also may be attributed to the overt connections that sustainable development as a concept makes between ecological degradation and poverty in the context of on-going development under capitalism.

Indeed, and as discussed in Chapter 2, sustainable development is a key concept of technocratic environmentalism and of the new regime of capitalist accumulation referred to in this thesis as green capitalism. The core assumption of sustainable development is twofold: it mandates economic growth, as it blames poverty for all ecological degradation; and it foresees no contradiction between economic growth and the conservation of nature (Government officer 2, 2013; NGO member 12, 2013). By extension, it assumes that what is needed is a system of scientific environmental management that combines both precepts (Government officer 3, 2013), thereby obscuring both the historical reasons behind ecological degradation and the continuing power relationships that inform development and conservation imperatives (Government officer 1, 2013; NGO member 25, 2013; Ministry of Environment 2011a; see also Chapter 4). Perhaps the novelty introduced by *buen vivir* is thus in the act of linking poverty with an uneven distribution of the costs and benefits of development, and hence the necessity for the application of instruments by which to more equitably distribute wealth (SENPLADES 2009), of which the PSB is an important mechanism, as illustrated below (Government officer 1, 2013). Yet, even this understanding does

not challenge the power relationships that produced the uneven distribution in the first place.

We have already noted that neoliberal environmentalists trained in BINGOs and local NGOs were instrumental in designing the PSB (Government officer 1, 2013; NGO member 13, 2013; see also Ministry of Environment 2012a). Now, neoliberal rationality attaches responsibility for ecological degradation to the poor, while positing that market-based mechanisms are the solution (NGO member 12, 2013). In this regard, PSB documents are clear about who is to blame for forest degradation:

[...] the high poverty levels or the rural zones of Ecuador *induce* deforestation as a subsistence strategy, which in the short term generates more poverty due to the loss of the goods and services that the native forests, paramos and other native vegetation types provide (MA #169, 14/Nov/2008, Preamble, Paragraph 9; emphasis added).

The PSB thus appears to be a nature conservation programme with the additional objectives of poverty alleviation and greenhouse emissions reduction, to be achieved by means of decreasing national deforestation rates (MA #169, 14/Nov/2008; MA #115, 12/Nov/2009). However, in practice, it is mostly an economic incentive system that distributes state revenues to the poorest populations in the country (NGO member 8, 2013; Indigenous representative 1, 2012). So the PSB has endeavoured to achieve its aims in two ways firstly, by setting up a system to deliver the economic incentives to whom they were intended and, secondly, to enrol into the Programme as many poor people as possible, reflecting an inherent disposition of attributing poverty as the main cause of forest degradation (Corson and MacDonald 2012, Sullivan 2013).

For securing the effective transference of payments, the PSB has developed a system for directly transferring the funds into the bank accounts of individual/collective landowners who participate in the scheme (MA #169, 14/Nov/2008; MA #115, 12/Nov/2009). By so doing, the PSB officers have been able to avoid the diversion of money often associated with traditional conservation projects, in which significant sums are routinely allocated to NGOs, technicians and local business partners instead of poor local communities (Government officer 1, 2013; NGO member 14, 2012). Hence, it is important that the poorest of the population receive the funds due to them in keeping with the PSB equation of chronic poverty with forest degradation.

In order to recruit as many low income beneficiaries as possible, the PSB developed a series of mechanisms to facilitate the access of individual and collective landowners (i.e. communities) to the incentive scheme: by 2013, and after five years of functioning, the Program managed to include almost one and a half million hectares under formal

conservation featuring more than 300,000 beneficiaries, while delivering in excess of US \$10 million in incentives, in 2015 alone (Ministry of Environment 2013c). This remarkable increase may be related to:

1. A progressive enlargement of the target beneficiaries of the PSB. Since 2011, the incentive was extended to foreigners, mortgaged properties, cooperatives and corporations, as well as properties inside the national system of protected areas, all of which were previously excluded (SOM 2012, Arts 4.1.1 and 5.1.6).
2. The diversification of the incentives to include not only 'natural' ecosystems but also altered ecosystems and 'productive' areas, like agro-forestry<sup>35</sup> areas (SOM 2011, Art. 2.2.5; MA #092 10/Jul/2012; MA #131, 19/Dec/2013, Art. 2).
3. The integration of the PSB into the administrative structure of the Ministry of Environment, allowing the Program to use the human resources of this agency. For example, from 2011, the Provincial Directors of the Ministry were instructed to receive applications while being encouraged to participate actively in PSB-linked outreach (SOM-PB 2012, Art. 7.1).

In this vein, the Synthesised Operative Manual of 2012 declared that the incentive scheme "will be structured to maximise the number of hectares to enter the Project" (SOM-PSB 2012, Art. 4.1). To this end, that structure has favoured small individual landowners as well as collective landowners – both considered to be among the poorest populations of the country (see Table 5.4 below). Indeed, and according to the PSB designers themselves, the structure of the incentive has indeed been modified in order to target the poorest while promoting thereby greater social equality in rural areas (Government officer 1, 2013).

Indeed, poverty is held to be principally responsible for ecological degradation in a myriad of official documents. For example, the PNBV discussed above asserts that "the major impacts of productive activities over [natural] resources are due to urgent needs of [the Ecuadorian] population" (SENPLADES 2013: 222). This document goes on to quote extensively a study sponsored by Conservation International which reports that a virtual emptying of the countryside was responsible for a whopping 60% of the reduction in deforestation rates between 2000-2008, thereby highlighting how out-migration to urban areas combined with a reduced birth rate in rural areas – "in general, smaller families generate less deforestation" - was the key factor (SENPLADES 2013: 72). Furthermore, the study suggests that the shift of the rural

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<sup>35</sup> Agroforestry systems combine trees, shrubs and palms with cultures and livestock in the same terrain at the same time or in time-sequence (Synthesised Operative Manual of the PSB 2012, Art. 2.2.2).

workforce into non-agricultural jobs combined with the modernisation of agriculture are also important factors in the declining deforestation rate – once again thus suggesting that small-scale farming is, in part at least, responsible for forest loss (SENPLADES 2013).

Similarly, the rural population, which in 2010 was estimated to be 4.3 times poorer than the urban population (INEC 2010), is held responsible for the on-going expansion of the agricultural frontier into hitherto forested regions, a process that is officially seen to be the primary driver of deforestation (Ministry of Environment 2000, 2010b). Of course this idea is not new. More than ten years before, for example, the Ministry of Environment, together with a local NGO and the IUCN carried out a comprehensive assessment of Ecuadorian biodiversity, including the forestry sector – the Biodiversity Report (Ministry of Environment *et al.* 2001)- which was widely cited as the major contribution for Ecuadorian policy-making regarding nature conservation issues until at least 2012<sup>36</sup>. The report concurred with the CI account as well as the PNBV's view when it declared that “deforestation is not only due to commercial logging; it is also related to the expansion of the agricultural frontier conducted by poor immigrants or farmers” (Ministry of Environment *et al.* 2001: 34).

This specification of the role of poverty in deforestation is not inaccurate, but public policy in the forestry sector omits any consideration of the power relationships shaping such outcomes, let alone the historical and structural causes of deforestation (see Chapter 4). Instead, the process is seen to be nothing more than a simple operation of market logic. For example, the 2013-2017 PNBV literally repeats some of the conclusions of the CI report, asserting notably that the poor living close to or in forested areas can opt whether to deforest or not due to an economic rationality in which the “deforestation agents decide in function of the value of transforming forest into other land uses against the value of not deforesting” (SENPLADES 2013: 72). Given this narrative, the solution too must be an economic one in order to achieve the 'right' set of incentives.

What is more, although official documents acknowledge the major role that industries play in deforestation – particularly agribusiness but also oil and mineral extraction -- environmental policy continues to target *only* the poor population for remedial action. For example, the Biodiversity Report cited above affirms that, while poor immigrants

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<sup>36</sup> Some of the official documents that cite this report are: National policy and strategy for biodiversity (Ministry of Environment 2001), Second and Fourth National Reports for the Convention of Biological Diversity (Ministry of Environment 2009, 2010), Baseline of deforestation in Continental Ecuador (Ministry of Environment 2012b), National Plan of Development 2007-2010 and National Plan for Good Living 2009-2013 (SENPLADES 2007, 2009).

“knock down the original vegetation and change it for crops and pastures, the farmers clear bigger extensions of land to devote them to export crops, as they have the economic resources for it” (Ministry of Environment *et al.* 2001: 34). No word in all of this of industry. In contrast, the PNBV does suggest that the expansion of monocultures and grazing areas for agribusiness as well as the oil extraction frontier are the main causes of the agricultural frontier’s expansion (SENPLADES 2009, 2013). For instance, the 2009 PNBV (2009: 221) linked the increment in national deforestation rates to the increment of oil exploitation as well as increased exports of certain agricultural goods such as oil palm, shrimp, flowers and banana, while later it reported that, despite all efforts, agribusiness-related deforestation “remains a major concern for the country” (SENPLADES 2013: 227). However, and despite such analyses, little has been done to control the expansion of agribusiness, let alone oil and mineral extraction; indeed, these powerful industries are still expanding their activities across the country (Government officer 2, 2013; NGO member 20, 2012; NGO member 10, 2013; NGO member 13, 2013; see also section 5.4).

As such, environmental public policy promotes nature conservation by encouraging economic growth of the poor while distracting attention from the role of industry in deforestation (SENPLADES 2007, 2009). The PSB is the corollary of these intentions, promoting forest conservation by delivering economic incentives – a financial mechanism which is a model of technocratic knowledge - that will enhance the material conditions of the poorest populations while the role of big business is not questioned, no less challenged; essentially, there is a failure generally to acknowledge the politicized character of environmental change (Ministry of Environment 2011a, 2012a). This is reflected in the fact that the PSB does not prevent oil or mining extraction within the ‘conservation areas’, an issue to which I shall return in section 5.4.2.

Accordingly, the Preamble of the Ministerial Agreement that created the PSB urges the application of a package of economic incentives in an effort to reduce deforestation rates in the country while simultaneously attaining economic growth for the poor:

To discourage subsistence deforestation in areas and populations with high poverty levels, it is necessary to adopt mechanisms that contribute to improve the life conditions of the population (MA #169, 14/Nov/2008, Preamble, Paragraph 10).

In reality, though, as the PSB has developed over time, it became clearer that the economic incentive delivered by the PSB to its partners to stem deforestation has been unable to compete with major deforestation drivers across the country (de Koning *et al.* 2011). To date, for instance, that incentive has only been able to challenge cattle ranching in the Amazon, and not in the *paramo* where the socio-environmental impacts

of such practices are greater (Government officer 1, 2013). Hence, it is uncertain how much deforestation can be halted in scenarios where it represents a significant threat -- as opposed to a more limited one, as is the case at present in the Amazon.

The competitive weakness of the incentive may therefore significantly reduce the effectiveness of the PSB as a financial mechanism by which to conserve nature. However, it has reported success in conserving ecosystems in those properties enrolled in the programme, namely the 'PSB conservation areas'. For example, the PSB reports to have been monitoring the conservation areas since 2009 using "a set of methodological tools including geographic information systems (GIS) and the combined use of remote sensing techniques and *in situ* verification" (Programa Socio Bosque 2014). By 2012, the PSB claimed to have monitored 35.7% of the 1,116,215 hectares that formed part of the programme at that time (Table 5.2); the majority of the area was evaluated through in-situ verification (70%) and the rest using remote-sensing instruments (30%) (Ministry of Environment 2013c: 5-6). Nevertheless, the report offers no information on the conservation status of the ecosystems inside the Conservation areas, reducing the evaluation to a rather unhelpful tally of the number of properties and hectares enrolled in the programme.

Table 5.2 Number of properties and area monitored

Year	In-situ monitoring		Remote sensing monitoring		TOTAL	
	Properties #	Area (ha)	Properties #	Area (ha)	Properties #	Area (ha)
2009	52	154,065.59				
2010	51	26,226.50	260	120,000		
2011	345	43,674.02				
2012	530	54,480.79				
<b>TOTAL</b>	978	278,446.90	260	120,000	1,238	398,446.9

Source: Ministry of Environment 2013c: 6

In contrast, in 2011 the PSB hired a private firm to conduct an independent evaluation of the conservation areas. The conclusion was that:

75% of the visited properties proved to have native vegetation cover, while the rest of the areas verified activities that could potentially affect the dynamics or structure of the area. Nonetheless, when there is disturbance, it occurs in less than 0.5% of the conservation area [...] This was confirmed using satellite images, which showed that 99.6% of the conservation areas are not affected by any kind of activity (Ministry of Environment 2013c: 7-8).

This assessment was conducted over a period of eight months, covering 81.6% of the total area enrolled in the programme. Unlike the PSB monitoring cited above, this Report asserts that the majority of the PSB conservation areas were monitored using

remote sensing instruments (70%), while the rest were verified in-situ (30%) (Ministry of Environment 2013c).

And yet, the study provides no account of the reasons for the apparent effectiveness of the mechanism; for example, it does not clarify whether the delivery of the incentive is related to the fact that the forest is being conserved. In this connection, the PSB has been criticised for expending public funds on lands displaying a high probability of remaining conserved even without that financial incentive (Government officer 1, 2013). Indeed, in 2013, even the PSB National Director declared:

[W]e don't care if [the forest] is threatened. We compensate the conservation [not the avoided deforestation]. And yes, there is criticism; they ask 'how much is the deforestation being stopped?' And I say: 'we are paying compensation for conservation, not necessarily for deforestation reduction, that is REDD+ [...]'. Because I realise that it is only with incentives that deforestation is not going to be reduced, there are better incentives than the PSB; for example, palm or any other productive activity provides better revenues (Government officer 1, 2013).

As such, and from a technocratic point of view, the PSB resulted in nothing more than a rural subsidy designed as a tool for wealth distribution rather than as an effective nature conservation instrument (NGO member 8, 2013; Scholar 3, 2013). Hence, for some, the PSB may be part of the general governing style of President Correa characterised by delivering various subsidies to diverse parts of the population as a form of wealth distribution and social unrest control (Government officer 2, 2013; Indigenous representative 1, 2012; NGO member 8, 2013). That said, Correa has especially increased the number and amount of subsidies specifically targeting the poorest– the total amount doubled under the current government from US \$2,021 million in 2006 to US \$4,800 in 2011– (Ruiz and Iturralde 2013: 87, 88) – although political patronage calculations still often come into the question.

If this essentially *political* calculation is indeed the case, then, the PSB is part of plain, business-as-usual capitalist development disguised as environmentalism, and not 'true' green capitalism (Böhm et al, 2012, Brand and Wissen 2013). This also reveals, in turn, the struggle and power relationship inside the state. While some state agencies – i.e. the Ministry of Environment or environmentalists inside SENPLADES – may be willing to conserve forests through delivering an economic incentive, other arms of the state – i.e. the Ministries that command natural resource extraction – push for a capitalist development model that still relies on fossil fuels. This tension is more apparent when extractive interests clash with conservation interests, as will be discussed in section 5.4.2. If this is the case, technocratic environmentalism is then instrumentalised by the state for its means of capitalist development. So, while the state delivers an economic incentive to the poorest that inhabit the forests, it promotes

the same capitalist, fossil fuel dependant development, hand-in-hand with agribusiness, oil and mining industries.

In short, there is apparently a genuine interest to distribute national wealth through instruments such as the PSB, especially to assist poor rural dwellers, even as keen efforts here also relate to the perceived necessity to increase the total amount of land under formal protection, as the National Plan for Good Living mandates. However, it also has the effect of increasing an official presence across the country (including its hitherto most 'remote' areas) as part of the construction of a modern capitalist state (see section 5.4). In so doing, the PSB produces capitalist nature and territory and a particular form of human/nature relationship mediated by relations of monetary exchange, greatly simplifying a multi-dimensional issue (i.e. deforestation), and helping to homogenise the diverse territories of Ecuador into one governable space (Government officer 2, 2013; Scholar 3, 2013). These precepts are analysed in the sections that follow.

### **5.3 The state's production of nature**

As part of the theoretical framework, chapter 2 introduced the various strands of environmentalism as they relate to a specific understanding of nature. Technocratic environmentalism adopts an understanding of nature in which science characterizes how nature *really is*; hence presuming that nature is a static and unchangeable entity, set apart from history. Nature, then, can be measured and managed towards a supposedly balanced and 'natural' condition before (or beyond) human history (Castree 2001, 2013). On the contrary, the perspective of social nature gives a rather different approach in which nature is produced by human activity as 'first' or 'second' nature (Smith 2010). Therefore, from the perspective of social nature production, I analyse how the PSB produces a fractured nature by applying a specific understanding of the rights of nature. Additionally, I found that nature that is produced in this way, it is then reserved by the PSB for future 'green' or 'fossil' capitalist accumulation. This process informs a particular type of human/nature relationship that is mediated by money and requires the production of a commodity that is still in embryonic phase. Those arguments are developed next.

#### **5.3.1 Fractured nature**

As noted earlier, the notion of the rights of nature is neither much referred to in the environmental public policy domain nor for that matter an accurate reflection (at least as it is widely articulated) of the complex human-environmental dynamics that



characterise 'nature' in Ecuador. In the particular case of the PSB, this situation may be partially explained by the fact that the Programme was created in November 2008 (MA #169, 14/Nov/2008), while the Constitution that granted formal rights to nature was approved only in October 2009. Indeed, it was only in 2012 that the rights of nature were even noted in one of its documents: namely, the "Operative Manual for ecological restoration" (MA #092, 10/Jul/2012). Thus, in the preamble, readers are directed to Articles 71 and 72 of the Constitution, which refers in turn to them: i.e. natures' "very existence along with its vital cycles, structures, functions and evolutionary processes", as well as to the fact that it is the state's duty to encourage people to protect nature and "all the elements that comprise an ecosystem"; they are also directed to Article 74 which grants the right to people to gain the benefits of "the environment and its natural richness" (MA #092, 10/Jul/2012, Preamble, Paragraphs 3-5). Further, the Ministerial Agreement that transformed the PSB into a national programme of incentives featured a declaration that nature must be used in a "rational and sustainable" manner (MA #131, 19/Dec/2013, Preamble, paragraph 6). Here again, though, we are presented with the idea of nature disentangled from humans, something that is now firmly a part of sustainable development thinking.

In this sense, the PSB is actively contributing to the production of the idea of a non-human, external nature that is the subject of rights to be preserved, sustainably used or restored by appropriate management. But whether nature is earmarked to be conserved, used or restored, the ultimate aim is the same: sustainable development. Take for example what a widely-distributed leaflet produced by the PSB in 2012, says:

In the Constitution, Nature was recognised for the first time as the subject of Rights; while its conservation, sustainable use and restoration were specified as mandatory, all of this is part of *Sumak Kawsay* or good living for the development of Ecuadorian society (Ministry of Environment 2012a: 3; capital letters in the source).

Moreover, in the efforts the PSB makes to define the sorts of nature which it deems to be worthy of conserving (in order to thereby determine where to concentrate its efforts), there is revealed a prevalent idea of a 'first' nature untouched by human action and influence – that is, a non-human nature (NGO member 25, 2013; Scholar 3, 2013). Thus, for example, Operative Manuals define the types of vegetation to be considered for protection under the programme as those resulting from "natural process of ecological succession". Hence, forestry plantations, secondary forests and *paramo* areas with intensive grazing and monocultures are excluded (MA #115, 12/Nov/2009; SOM-PSB 2012, Arts. 2.2.1-2.2.3). By establishing the level of 'naturalness' of a given vegetation type in reference to the level of human intervention expended on it and, more than that, by the geographical proximity of human populations, the PSB is

producing the idea of ‘first’ nature out of second nature (Smith 2010). This is notably evidenced by the geographic prioritisation index that was developed in order to set the eligibility criteria for areas to become part of the scheme (see Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 PSB geographic prioritisation index

Variable	Sub-variables and indicators for forests and paramos
<b>Threat level</b>	1) Proximity to roads and navigable rivers: distance and inclination of the terrain
	2) Demographic pressure: population density
	2) Historical patterns of deforestation/land use change: number of spatial unities that have changed between 1990 and 2007
<b>Ecosystem services</b>	1) Refuge of biodiversity: percentage of vegetation types underrepresented in the PANE <sup>1</sup>
	2) Hydrological regulation: important areas for water generation and regulation
	3) Carbon storage: biomass
	4) Connectivity: not explained
<b>Poverty level</b>	Percentage of the population with unsatisfied basic needs, compared with the average of the rural population of the Sierra

<sup>1</sup>Patrimony of State Natural Areas

Source: MA #115, Operative Manual of PSB, 12/Nov/2009; SOM-PSB 2012, Art.3.

The proximity and accessibility of human populations to the area are considered factors that threaten nature (Variable 1 in Table 5.3). In this sense, the notion that humans belong to nature – an idea supposedly contained in the rights of nature notion, in the popular ecologist strand and in appreciations of nature as universal - fades away. Rather, nature is something external to protect *from* human action (Government officer 3, 2013; see also Cisneros and Nieto 2012).

But, as Smith (2007, 2010) noted, in capitalist societies, first nature has been produced out of second nature as a green capitalist accumulation strategy. In this sense, first nature is produced and reserved for future green capitalist markets while second nature would be producing the same old commodities – i.e. wood, oil, food, or minerals -. Here, first nature is defined as a provider of ecosystem services of carbon storage, biodiversity refuge, hydrological regulation and *paramo* connectivity (Variable 2 in Table 5.3). This ‘untouched’ nature must provide such benefits for human populations; failing this, it could lose its place as a category of nature worthy of conservation. But where changes occur to first nature, resulting in it losing its capacity to provide ecosystem services, it then becomes second nature. The coexistence of these two natures is resolved by enclosing them both within the overarching concept of sustainable development and by territorial planning (see section 5.4).

Nevertheless, the picture here is more nuanced than just described. Since 2009, for instance, the PSB has offered incentives for ecological restoration (MA #092, 10/Jul/2012), which thereby pictures the production of first nature from within and as part of second nature: first nature capable of providing required ecosystem services. Indeed, the main goal of the ecological restoration chapter of the PSB is “to increase the provision of ecosystem services through activities of ecological restoration applied in areas undergoing a process of ecological degradation under a focus of integral landscape management that favours the improvement of the life quality of its inhabitants” (MA #092, 10/Jul/2012, Art. 2.1). The areas eligible for restoration are “post-harvest forestry areas, dry zones, anthropic ecosystems, abandoned pastures” – that is, notably secondary forests that can be ecologically recovered with the assistance of human intervention (so-called active restoration) or by a process of natural ecological succession (so-called passive restoration) (MA #092, 10/Jul/2012, Art. 3.2.1). Yet for the PSB, nature that is recovered by means of “natural processes” is apparently more valuable than nature that is helped to recover by human means, as evinced by the amount of incentive money allocated in each case. As such, beneficiaries receive a greater amount if they allow passive restoration on their properties than if they decide to pursue active restoration (MA #092, 10/Jul/2012, Art. 5.1). For the PSB, first nature appears more valuable than second nature.

In any case, the requirements are the same: to establish enclosures where nature that is worth being conserved can exist or be allowed the time to recover. Of course, the idea of natural enclosures is not new, and national parks created since the 1970s in Ecuador have followed this same rationale (NGO member 25, 2013; see also Chapter 4); neither *buen vivir* nor rights of nature have been able to challenge this enduring idea.

Further, the existence of a payment to the local landowners has prompted accusations to the Programme for being a form of nature’s commodification thus giving rise to the question of whether or not nature is, in fact, being produced directly as a commodity by the PSB? Given these stakes, it is important to understand the mechanism used to set the payment to landowners, a topic to which we turn next. This discussion helps to further clarify the role of the PSB in the process of commodification of nature for prospective green markets, and hence in the constitution of a green capitalist strategy. In turn, this discussion sets the scene for the responses from non-governmental actors as well as local community-based ecologism, which are canvassed in Chapters 6 and 7 respectively.

### 5.3.2 Commoditized nature

Certainly, both critical ecologists and indigenous organisations have described the PSB as a ‘market-based’ mechanism that commodifies nature and hence modifies the relationship of local, usually indigenous people, with nature (e.g. CONFENIAE 2009; CONAIE 2011, Ramos 2010, Ecological Action 2012a, see below). However, and although it does involve a monetary payment, the programme does not technically involve any actual participation in markets, even as the commodity in question is barely defined.

Nevertheless, both the creation of enclosures and the implementation of a structure of economic incentives can be plausibly seen as early steps in commodity creation. Thus, it was already noted that the PSB requires establishment of a “conservation area” (i.e. natural enclosure) as part of its programme. Inside that area, there exist various forbidden activities not deemed as “rational or sustainable”. These activities include: (1) logging; (2) changes of land use; (3) the igniting of fires; (4) intensive or semi-intensive grazing; (5) commercial or sports hunting; and (6) any activity that “alters or threatens natural behaviour, the capacity to be a refuge for biodiversity, the natural hydrological conditions or the carbon stocks of the ecosystem” (MA #115, 12/Nov/2009 and SOM-PSB 2012, Art. 8).

It is these sorts of prohibitions that have raised concern among many indigenous movement activists as well as critical environmentalists precisely because they are seen to be serious constraints on territorial indigenous autonomy; or, to be more precise, on how communities organise the use and production of their collective territories (NGO member 1, 2012; Ecological Action 2012a; see also Chapter 6) in continued exchange and negotiation with the state (Erazo 2013). For CONAIE, for instance, the PSB “is a form of usurpation of the territories” (CONAIE 2011: para.19). Similarly, members of Tola Chica community (see Chapter 7), informed me during fieldwork that they rejected the possibility of enrolling in the PSB due to the perceived risk of being deprived of territorial autonomy:

The [PSB officers] approached us and offered us US \$450 a year. It is an insult. The contract said that we would lose authority over the forest, that we had to be calling them, asking them if we could use [the forest]. That is painful: asking for authorisation to get into the forest (Community member 3, 2013).

We had warnings from communities of the Amazon that this was a strategy of intervention into the communitarian spaces. The only advantage was to receive a subsidy but how can you sell your mother? As much as they respect the fact of receiving money, it is not worth it (Indigenous representative 4, 2013).

Even an indigenous representative from the Amazon, who is sympathetic with the PSB, acknowledges the possible threat to territorial autonomy. For him:

[Communities should] not compromise [to the programme] the whole territory, but a part of it. They shall not risk the whole territory, mortgaging their future, but they could enrol [in the PSB] infertile lands or lands that protect watersheds and get paid for it, as part of their territorial zoning. I see no problem in it; if agriculture is subsidised in the United States, why not conservation? (Indigenous representative 1, 2012).

Here it is important to note that the natural enclosure associated with the payment is, for indigenous organisations, “a form of commodification of the *Pachamama* elements” (CONAIE 2011: para.19), namely of producing nature directly as a commodity. This influences the form in which local people produce nature, as it passes from producing use values for immediate human use, to produce mainly exchange values, commodities to be exchanged and consumed elsewhere in the capitalists market (Castree 2003, Smith 2010).

The commodity, although still diffuse, would become manifest in material terms via the agreed-upon enclosure associated with the pricing process. Given the apparent centrality of – and controversy surrounding - this process, the discussion needs to clarify here the details of the PSB pricing structure. To that end, Table 5.4 presents how the price is set and how the pricing unit is selected. In order to set the price, the number of hectares enrolled in the programme is considered, along with the type of ecosystem (paramo or forest) and the type of participant (individual or collective). The pricing unit would be “one hectare of conserved ecosystem”.

Table 5.4. Structure of the PSB incentive

Individual properties in paramo and forests		Collective property in paramo		Collective property in forest	
Area (Ha)	Price/Ha (US \$)	Area (Ha)	Price/Ha (US \$)	Area (Ha)	Price/Ha (US \$)
1-20 <sup>1</sup>	60	1-50	60	1-100	35
1-50 <sup>2</sup>	30				
51-100	20	51-100	40	101-500	22
101-500	10	101-900	20	501-1,800	13
501-5,000	5	901-3,000	10	1,801-5,000	6
5,001-10,000	2	3,001-10,000	4	5,001-10,000	3
More than 10,000	0.5	More than 10,000	1	More than 10,000	0.7

<sup>1</sup> For properties smaller than 20 hectares

<sup>2</sup> For properties larger than 20 hectares

Source: SOM-PSB 2012, Art. 4

Table 5.4 notably shows that the structure of the incentive scheme appears to stimulate the participation of collective landowners (i.e. indigenous collective property). Indeed, the enrolment of indigenous territories in the PSB is not a minor issue in the eyes of the state (Government officer 1, 2013). Such territories represent one-third of the native ecosystems of the entire country, while containing important natural resources such as oil, minerals, water and biodiversity (Programa Socio Bosque 2012). The Amazonian territories are particularly important here, and hence PSB is notably tailored for this region. Meanwhile, indigenous territories across the country are also the foci of extreme poverty. Indeed, statistical information shows that income poverty affects 54% of the indigenous population, compared to 20% of mestizo, 45% of *montubio* and 33% of Afro Ecuadorian populations (INEC 2012). Therefore, and despite all of the concerns of indigenous activists and critical environmentalists noted above, by 2012 indigenous lands encompassed 89.5% of the total area enrolled in the PSB, 73.24% of which was located within the five Amazon provinces (Programa Socio Bosque 2012a). As Juliet Erazo reported, “when an opportunity arises to fund administrative costs into the foreseeable future, [indigenous communities] leadership feels strong pressures to engage in these collaborations” (Erazo 2015: 4). It is probable that it is because these numbers highlighted the strong state focus on indigenous lands across Ecuador that CONFENIAE disapproved the PSB; still, it also acknowledged that the final decision rested with the communities and their grassroots organisations:

CONFENIAE will neither negotiate nor dialogue without the grassroots organisations’ consent on the topics of oil extraction, mining, hydroelectric dams, Socio Bosque, REDD, environmental services, etc., since certain entities, like the World Bank and the carbon markets in alliance with Latin American governments, are trying to negotiate the lives of the Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples [and] undermine our territorial rights (CONFENIAE 2009: para.2).

This passage precisely depicts the perceived links between the PSB and REDD+ that worry the regional indigenous organisation (Erazo 2015). Indeed, in undertaking the empirical research for this thesis during 2013, I directly witnessed a growing interest in financing the PSB through mechanisms such as REDD+, corporate social responsibility and the carbon market. That said, this interest was rather ambiguous. Thus, for example, the National Director of the PSB, in a public forum in 2012, declared himself to be “increasingly sceptical of REDD” (Government officer 1, 2012). When I interviewed him, his disquiet became even clearer:

[To speak about] REDD+ is complicated for me because we have to promote it but we are trying to denote the differences between both initiatives. Something that worries me is that if I pay for the ecosystem service of carbon sequestration [to people] in highly endangered areas I could cause the [people in] less threatened areas to say ‘why am I not getting paid? I’m going to threaten the ecosystem in order to get paid’. Then I would have to pay them too: it is a perverse incentive. [...]

Regarding the carbon, it is insane, because maybe one area of the country could be far more important for carbon, but maybe another one could be important for water or biodiversity. [...] Plus, you have to look for the buyers, which is really complex: there are not buyers for all the services. Personally, I don't like it (Government officer 1, 2013).

Despite this response, he nevertheless recognised that the dependence of the PSB on REDD+ and other new financial mechanisms could soon increase due to a funding shortage:

Right, we need REDD+, if we can get funds from it [...]. The problem we have is funding; we don't have secured funding for the 20 years that a Conservation Agreement lasts, so the more aid we have the less pressure on the national treasury (Government officer 1, 2013).

Indeed, at present the PSB is funded almost entirely by the public budget but once the goal of 3.6 million enrolled hectares is reached, the PSB would need to locate funding from elsewhere to complement the public input and pay the amounts committed to the programme participants. In anticipation of this scenario, PSB officers have developed a financial strategy that includes:

1. Public budget (45%).
2. Socio Bosque Certificates (CERs): private investments in exchange for a green certificate (5%).
3. International cooperation: traditional international aid (10%),
4. Regulations and trade-offs: to include the PSB in the existing mechanisms that compensate for vegetation clearing (30%).
5. REDD+: the PSB would access REDD+ funds as a project that enhances nature conservation (10%) (Ministry of Environment 2012c).

Public funding is secured until 2017 (the year President Correa ceases his term in office) and so there is some uncertainty over the programme funding in the post-2017 period, as there is a constitutional prohibition on allocating budgets in advance. As such, the programme funding depends on political will (Ministry of Environment 2013c; Government officer 1, 2012). In this scenario, the National Director foresees a possible articulation to REDD+:

I think a portion [of REDD+ funding] would go to the PSB. There is interest from the REDD+ people as well because now they are talking about compensating carbon stock (conserving the mass) and carbon flux (reducing deforestation). That is perfect, as the PSB is a carbon stock activity. Also, they want the incentive to be delivered directly to the communities and we are already doing that. So the idea is that part of the PSB incentive comes in that way (Government officer 1, 2013).

For his part, the government officer in charge of developing REDD+ in Ecuador considers that "both initiatives could be complementary" (Government officer 6, 2014),

as the PSB is considered “an essential element in the ONU-REDD+ Programme” (Ministry of Environment 2012a: 33). Indeed, some steps have been taken already. In 2011, the German government contributed €10 million for the consolidation of the PSB and the development of the National REDD+ Strategy and, in 2012, the PSB formally became part of the strategy (Ministry of Environment 2012c).

Moreover, the Ministry of Environment acknowledges that the main source of REDD+ would be the carbon market (Ministry of Environment 2013c: 14). How the PSB, REDD+ and the carbon market will be connected in practice has yet to be seen. Still, it is possible that the structure assembled by the PSB including, but not reduced to, the establishment of natural enclosures associated with a payment, presages the early stages of the formation of a tradable commodity for domestic or international green markets. This is so as the PSB pricing of a “conserved hectare” already involves a certain level of commodification, which will be completed with the linking to a future green market (NGO member 23, 2013).

Another feature of the commodity production by the PSB is the fact that conservation areas are interchangeable with zones of natural resource extraction. Thus, it is true that the PSB conservation areas are not protected from future extractive activities: if the state finds oil or minerals under the ground of a conservation area, they will proceed to exploit the reserves. In that case, the programme officers would recommend using the existence of the PSB economic incentive given to landowners to support the argument that the oil or mining industry ought to pay compensation to the landowners (Ministry of Environment 2012a). The incentive for nature conservation could be then equated to a compensation for nature destruction. As the PSB National Director puts it:

When an oil concession occurs within the area [...] we will exclude the concession area and a buffer zone. The amount we pay will decrease and, of course, we tell the landowners ‘you have to ask for compensation because you are [loosing] a profit; a loss of profit for 20 years’. So, they have another argument for getting compensation. We cannot do more than that for now (Government officer 1, 2013).

To this end, a leaflet entitled “Questions and Answers of the PSB” addresses this matter directly:

What happens with oil and mining concessions?

These issues are beyond the jurisdiction of the PSB. The programme respects the actions considered strategic by the National Government and its National Plan for Good Living. In the case that a partner is affected by a mining or petroleum activity, they should consider in their negotiations the income that, for their involvement in Socio Bosque, they would stop receiving upon the mining or oil activity entering their property (Programa Socio Bosque, n.d.).



As Smith (2007, 2010) argued, nature is internalised in the capitalist production process to produce exchange value either as part of the new green economy or the well-established oil and mining extractive industry. Hence the PSB may produce nature for new green markets – carbon or ecosystem markets - while other sectors of the state produce nature for traditional markets. Nature, here, is reduced to a capitalist accumulation strategy. This requires, in turn, maintaining the appreciation of nature alienated from the social sphere, an external nature far away from those appreciations of universal nature supposedly contained in the notion of rights of nature or in the “harmony with nature” subtext of *buen vivir*. The process of nature ‘green’ proxy commodification led by the PSB, too, locates firmly the state’s environmentalism with those strands that aim to internalize external nature in the capitalist market in order to save it (McAfee 2015). In other words, the market-based environmentalism already discussed in section 5.2.

Producing nature in this way is hence possible by producing, at the same time, a particular territory where production of nature for different markets occurs. So it is important here not to exaggerate the distance between different arms of the Ecuadorian State. Thus, while there may be differences between staff based at the PSB and those working in state agencies on the mining or oil sectors, there are continuities here too. Seen in this way, the PSB would be part of the forces that produce the state’s territory to order and control rural space, which is a necessary step in the capitalist production of nature. Additionally, the PSB may well ease the state’s access to spaces that are, to some extent, still autonomous, and specifically ‘remote’ indigenous territories. These areas are rich in diverse natural resources that the state and international capital both covet (see Chapter 4). Once more, this dynamic is framed within a sustainable development concept and poverty alleviation goal in order to socially and ecologically justify it. The role of the PSB in this overarching process of national territorial and nature production is assessed in the next section.

#### **5.4 The state’s production of territory**

So far, the present chapter has discussed state-linked environmentalism as one that has refashioned *buen vivir* as a de facto form of sustainable development that purports to harmonise natural resource extraction and nature conservation and the rights of nature as a benchmark that measures appropriate scientific administration of nature for development. In the process, nature is seen to be produced as fractured and commoditized – all-the-better to allow its simultaneous conservation and exploitation with the PSB involved in both processes. This last section of Chapter 5 will address

how these seemingly contradictory notions frame the PSB contribution to the territory production of the Ecuadorian national space, which is necessary for the extraction and export of raw materials, particularly oil and minerals, as part of the development model perpetuated by the current regime (SENPLADES 2009, 2013) but also to meet the needs of new green markets (Osborne 2015).

The PNBV produces the national territory through the National Territorial Strategy (Estrategia Territorial Nacional or ETN) and the Organic Code of Territorial Ordering, Autonomy and Decentralisation (Código Orgánico de Organización Territorial, Autonomía y Descentralización or COOTAD). The ETN is articulated to the development objectives of the PNBV while the COOTAD organises the country's territory at various sub-national levels of government (i.e. parishes, municipalities, counties). The aim of the latter is notably to “guarantee the local governments’ political, administrative and financial autonomy” (Art. 1). Alongside this, the Organic Code of Planning and Public Finances (Código Orgánico de Planificación y Finanzas Públicas or COPFP) connects public investment and the annual budget to national planning goals (SENPLADES 2011). Together, these various instruments of national government organise the allocation of funding at the local level (Government officer 2, 2013; Scholar 8, 2013).

Despite this apparently comprehensive institutional structure, however, the state's production of territory is not homogenous as it expresses the dialectical power relationships that struggle to imprint themselves on the ground namely, state-led activities and the local forces that resist/dialogue/interact with the former (Mançano Fernandes 2005, Hasbeaert 2011). In large parts of Ecuador, the production of territory is a negotiated process between the state and indigenous communities, which are regulated by the Law of Communes (Republic of Ecuador 1937 [2004]; see also Chapter 4). This Law has provided the legal framework and the political incentive for setting up *comunas* in the country, and thus it may represent a form of state territorialisation (Erazo 2013). Nonetheless, empirical work conducted in Tola Chica community for this PhD showed that throughout the years the collective action of *comuneros* has transformed the Law of Communes into a powerful political tool to reclaim territorial sovereignty and right to self-government, hence, a tool for community's territorial production (see a full discussion on this on Chapter 7).

It is in these areas governed by non-state local organisations that have collective ownership of the land as well as the right to “maintain and develop their own forms of social coexistence and organization, and of the exercise of authority” (Republic of

Ecuador 2008, Art. 57, section 9) where the PSB may have a role in disputing the territorial production on the side of the state. A concern arising from the research for this PhD is that the PSB could achieve this through the process of directing state funding to those territories and regularizing land tenure. Hence this distinctive political arrangement – which could be seen to be the essence of what is meant by the term the plurinational state - is liable to lead to tension with different levels of state power. In any of these endeavours, the PSB can be seen to be helping to order (or 'normalize') the nation's space for the development of the capitalist state.

The intention is not to exaggerate the state absence in the indigenous territories, not even in the neoliberal era. But it may be the case that the PSB has changed the way in which the state interacts with these territories, producing a more homogenous national territory that facilitates the production of nature “all the way down” for the capitalist market (Castree 2003: 282). The mechanisms by which the PSB contributes to such territorial production – land titling and comprehensive territorial planning - are reviewed next.

#### **5.4.1 Regularising the rural world**

The PSB sets a series of requirements and mechanisms that promote the ordering of the rural world to this end, even as it also regularises the relationship between rural people and 'non-human' nature. Consider some of the key steps associated with the enrolment of individual and collective landowners into the PSB. Such regularisation starts with the application to become a PSB beneficiary for which the individual and collective landowners must submit:

- Land titles and related documents (i.e. evidence of taxation and mortgage on the property).
- Certificate of the bank account to which the incentive will be transferred.
- Draft map of the proposed conservation area within the property. (MA #115, 12/Nov/2009, Art. 5.1; SOM-PSB 2012, Arts. 5.1.1, 5.1.6.1)

The collective applicants – communes and communities - must enclose the following:

- Evidence of agreement to participate in the PSB by the collective government, which is usually an Assembly.
- Documentation that certifies the legal status of the collective government and the accreditation of the president.

- Indigenous and ancestral peoples must submit a certificate of ancestry from the Council for Development of the Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples of Ecuador, a government institution (MA #115, 12/Nov/2009, Art. 5.1; SOM-PSB 2012, Arts 5.1.2, 5.1.3, 5.1.6.2).

If the application is approved, the new partners must then submit a detailed investment plan for the funds to be received as well as an equally detailed geo-referenced map of the property, which must depict clearly the location of the conservation area within the property (MA #115, 12/Nov/2009, Art. 5.2; SOM-PSB 2012, Art. 5.2). Next, and once the Conservation Agreement is signed, local participants become a *socio* ('partner'); meanwhile, the PSB retains all the documentation on file and next it establishes instruments for the monitoring and surveillance of the conservation areas.

Consequently, through textual analysis, measurements, cartography and other surveillance instruments, the rural world is ordered and organised for capitalist expansion (Ecological Action 2012b: 35). Indeed, maps and legal documentation act as an essential part of the material ordering of the country's rural space. In this regard, it is to be noted that land tenure in Ecuador is often irregular; in 2008, for instance, more than 40% of landowners nationally were not in possession of legal land titles (SENPLADES 2009: 145). Now, and as far as applying to the Programme is concerned, both individual and collective landowners must have legal titles to their land. As such, the PSB is, in effect, promoting land regularisation across Ecuador. As of 2015, each of the 2,748 participants who collectively own the 1,489,541 hectares enrolled in the programme (Programa Socio Bosque 2015) has submitted land titles and generated geo-referenced maps of their properties, often for the first time and at the communities' expense (Erazo 2015). This unparalleled processing of land titles is especially remarkable in indigenous lands: between 2008 and 2013, 404,554.26 hectares of ancestral territory had been covered by land titling, of which 97.5% involved territories in the Amazon (SENPLADES 2013: 94).

In regularising the territory, the PSB also regularises the relationship between rural people and the 'non-human' natural world. The Conservation Agreement thus commits participants to several responsibilities, the infringement of which could lead to a temporary suspension of the Agreement or its complete cancellation with some or even all dispensed funds accordingly to be reimbursed to government (MA #115, 12/Nov/2009 and SOM-PSB 2012, Arts. 9.3, 9.4 and 10). All of which requires a communitarian structure to observe the terms of the Conservation Agreement and administer penalties to community members and outsiders in case of non-compliance

(Erazo 2015). So far, there have been no incidences of complete cancellation of the Conservation Agreement and hence no return of funds. Nonetheless, the PSB Operative Manual clearly specifies the amounts to be recovered if applicable (Table 5.5), and establishes the authority of the Ministry of Environment to determine the procedure for reimbursement (without precluding the possibility of legal action against the participants either).

Table 5.5 Percentage of incentive's restitution required for the cancellation of the Conservation Agreement

<b>Time enrolled in the programme (years)</b>	<b>Percentage of the incentive to be restored</b>
1-5	100
6-10	75
10-15	50
15-20	25

Source: MA #115, 12/Nov/2009, Art. 10; SOM-PSB 2012, Art. 10

The sorts of activities noted earlier are grounds for this process to be set in motion, conflicting with local forms of territory production, for example shifting cultivation (NGO member 1, 2012). Thus, and as Table 5.6 illustrates, logging, a change of land use, the setting of fires, grazing, introducing exotic species or non-compliance with the investment plan could all lead to the cancellation of the Conservation Agreement (MA #115, 12/Nov/2009, Art. 8). Meanwhile, hunting (for commercial or sport purposes), failing to visibly identify the property as a “conservation area” or non-compliance with any other administrative requirements could lead to a temporary suspension of the Conservation Agreement and the loss of one incentive payment. In 2012, it was mandated that the Conservation Agreement must be inscribed in the Property Registry, thus transforming programme liabilities into legal obligations; once again, failing to do so involves the loss of one payment (SOM-PSB 2012, Art. 9.5).

Table 5.6 Forbidden activities, liabilities and reasons for cancellation/temporary suspension of a Conservation Agreement with the PSB

Reason for cancellation	Reason for temporary suspension
Forbidden activities	Forbidden activities
Logging, change of land use, intended fires, intensive or semi-intensive grazing	Hunting with commercial or sport aims
Any activity that alters or threatens the natural behaviour, the biodiversity refuge, the natural hydrological conditions or the carbon stocks of the ecosystem	
Obligations	Obligations
Comply with investment plans, forestry law and other legal tools	Inform any change in property rights, submit any required information (personal and of the property), submit every two years a certificate of the property taxes
	Prevent fires and inform if fire occurs
	Allow the access of the Ministry of Environment officers to the property and help them in doing their job, e.g. by signalling where the area under conservation is located
	Submit every two years a sworn statement confirming the conservation of the area and the appropriate use of the money

Source: MA #115, 12/Nov/2009 and SOM-PSB 2012, Art. 8

Other reasons for cancellation of the Conservation Agreement are non-compliance with the Forestry Law and other environmental instruments or any alteration of the “natural behaviour” of the ecosystems (MA #115, 12/Nov/2009, Art. 8). In short, this is a vast array of actions that can precipitate state intervention and punishment.

Moreover, the PSB is the entity that determines whether an activity is environmentally sustainable or not, thereby giving it considerable power over local landowners, showing a persistent “fear of the poor and of their claims to resources” (Asiyanbi 2016: 150) of technocratic environmentalism. At the same time, the PSB is in a position to shape how local people come to appreciate and use ‘non-human’ nature over time. In this way, the PSB not only produces nature as part of territory production but also implants a new system of regulation of society-nature relationships (Brand and Wissen 2013). However, the limitations of indigenous territorial autonomy and self-governance have to be acknowledged, as they are sometimes the outcome of complex processes of negotiation with the state rather than an undisputed imposition (Erazo 2013).

In a wider perspective, the impact of the PSB in producing first nature out of second nature and a form of human/nature relationship mediated by relations of monetary exchange (Government officer 2, 2013) is of considerable national and international

importance, especially given the scale of the programme's operations and 'reach' (Erazo 2013). Firstly, and as already noted, the PSB has already exceeded national targets for increasing the area under formal conservation or environmental management (see Figure 5.1). Secondly, this in turn has contributed to the notion of present-day Ecuador as a green state, with several international conservation agencies extolling its accomplishments while aiming to implement PSB-like programmes in other countries.<sup>37</sup> Further, the PSB has become a major player in the environmental management of the Ecuadorian Amazon, where the vast majority of indigenous territories are located, and where the notion of *buen vivir* in harmony with nature is said to have emerged (see Chapters 1 and 4). So, and to the extent that it is true that indigenous people subscribe to a different way of experiencing and relating to nature (and hence to how they produce nature and territory), this way of being is quite likely to be altered by such PSB action. Indeed, that the Programme does not, and cannot, prohibit extractive industries raises other questions about its role in producing an Ecuadorian territory still chiefly based on the extraction of oil and minerals – as is discussed in the following chapter.

#### **5.4.2 Producing territory**

Earlier, I argued that, rather than a conservation incentive per se, the PSB often mainly seems to be little more than a subsidy for the rural population (especially the poor), and hence serves primarily as a mechanism for the distribution of national income (Indigenous representative 1, 2012; NGO member 8, 2013; Government officer 2, 2013; Scholar 3, 2013; see also Erazo 2015). But, as it fails to exclude extractive industries from the areas it aims to conserve, the PSB is producing territory in order to harmonize nature production either for green markets or for conventional, fossil fuels dependant markets. Consequently the PSB is nothing more than a business-as-usual capitalist mechanism disguised as 'green capitalism' (Böhm et al, 2012, Brand and Wissen 2013). This can be confirmed by an analysis of the PSB conservation areas, that demonstrates how they collide with areas reserved for oil and mining, which are also inside indigenous territories, particularly in the Amazon. Hence, an overlap of conservation and exploitation areas has occurred, each of which will engage with different capitalist markets. In this regard, Figure 5.2 shows the location of oil and mining concessions as well as properties enrolled in the PSB as of 2012.

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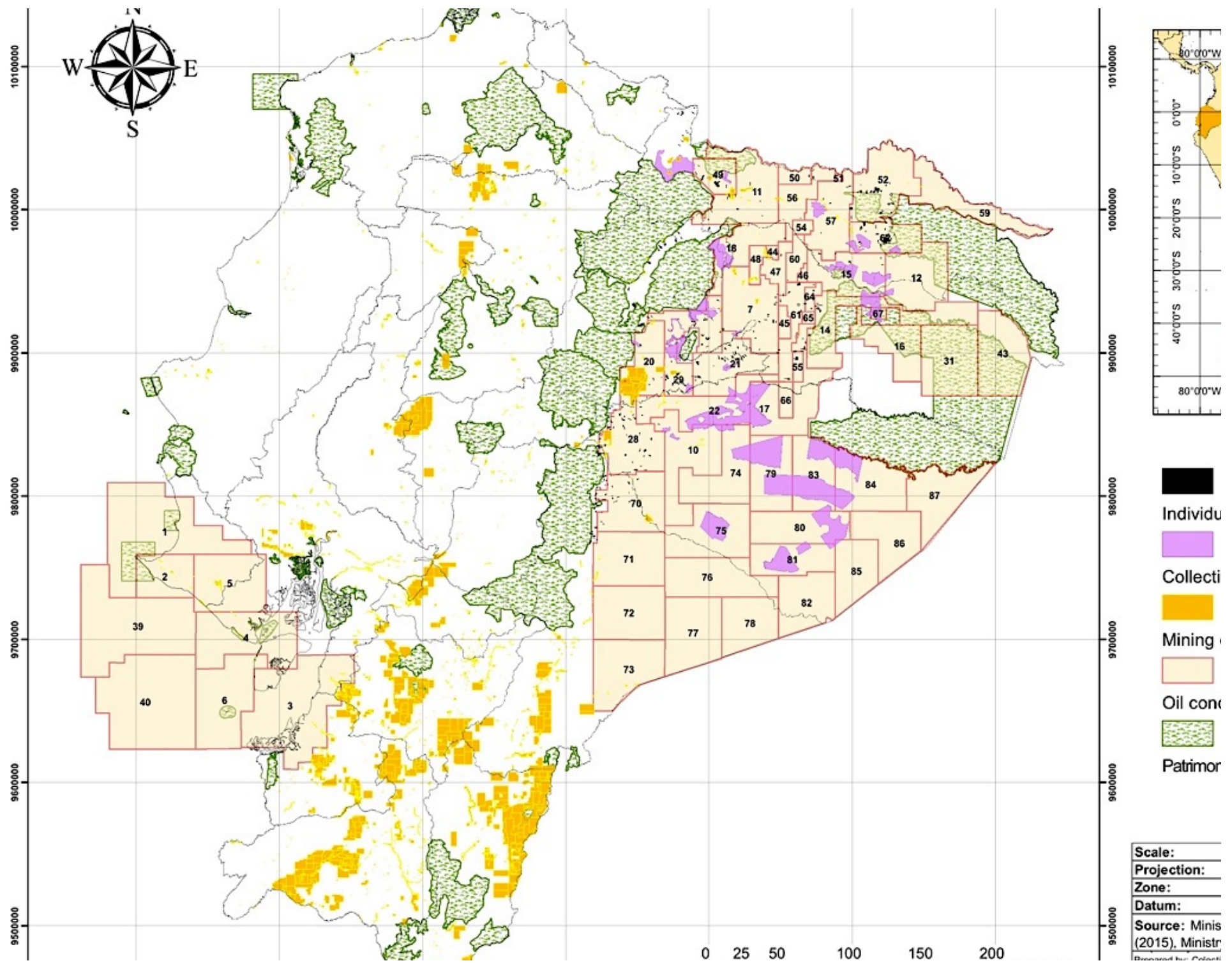
<sup>37</sup> Some of the international reports on the PSB are: Fenton (2010), Farooqui and Schultz (2012) and European Commission (2013), Robles Pillco (2016).

Figure 5.2 shows the resource concessions in the Ecuadorian Amazon with the most lucrative oil concessions dating from the 1960s in the northern Amazon, while zones in central and southern parts of the Amazon have been offered since 2012 (Amazon Watch 2015)<sup>38</sup>. It should be noted that the largest areas enrolled with the PSB (coloured in pink) correspond to indigenous territories of the Amazon and are indeed inside oil concessions, although they are not yet being exploited for oil. Similarly, the small pink areas located in the southeast of the map correspond to PSB conservation areas that overlap with large-scale mining concessions.

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<sup>38</sup> Both the expansion of oil exploitation and the commencement of large-scale mining are strongly contested in Ecuador by indigenous organisations with the support of NGOs, for it is precisely the impacts of oil extraction that catalysed the emergence of environmental organizations in the country (see Chapters 4 and 6). Oil development in the central and southern Ecuadorian Amazon has encountered significant resistance from indigenous organisations and, in consequence, oil exploitation has been delayed in the area. For further information on cases of oil resistance, visit: <http://www.pachamama.org/advocacy>; <http://amazonwatch.org/work/ecuador>. For information about the impacts of, and resistance to, large-scale mining, visit: <http://protectecuador.org/>.





Accordingly, the PSB economic incentive is distributed unevenly across the country, being concentrated in the Amazon region. Figure 5.3 shows the amount of funds delivered (by province) in 2012, displaying in red the Amazonian provinces that, together, received 54.16% of the total allocated (Programa Socio Bosque 2012). Additionally, in 2015 in excess of 80% of the hectares enrolled and more than 50% of the beneficiaries were located in the Amazon region (Programa Socio Bosque 2015).

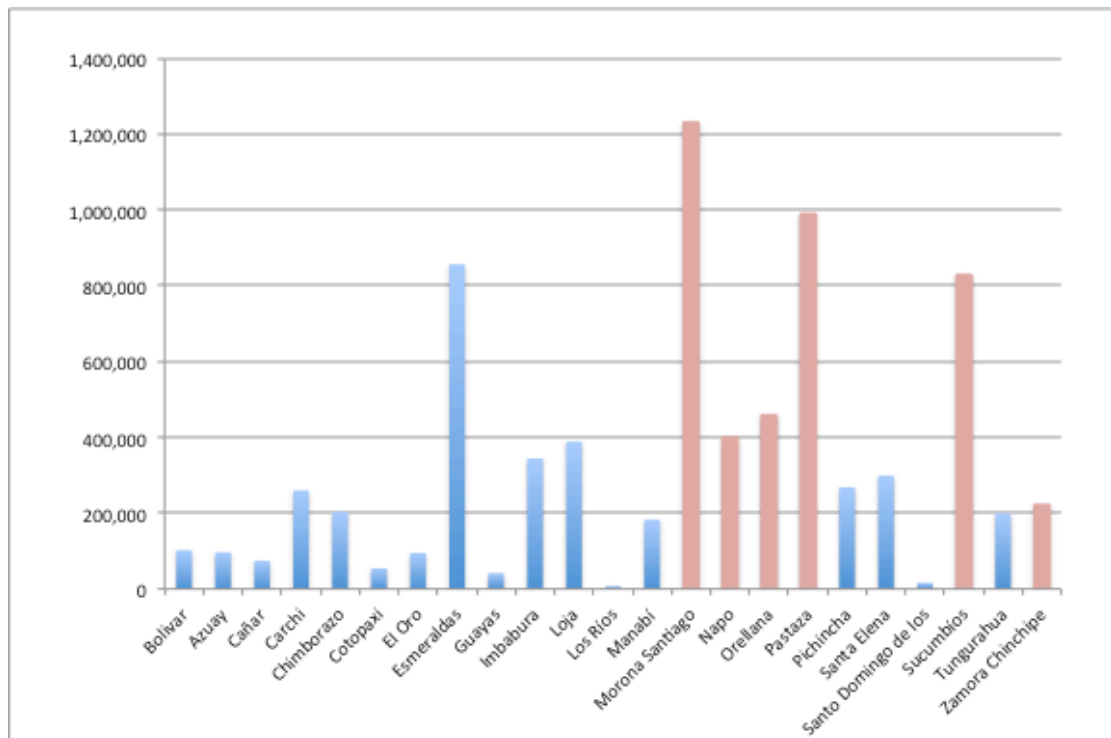


Figure 5.3 Amount of incentives delivered by province in 2012 (in US \$). Amazon provinces noted in red.

Source: Programa Socio Bosque 2012a: 1.

It is evident that there is a skewed distribution of PSB incentives to the Amazon, a region that contains one-third of the country's forests. It also contains the greatest amount of poverty: 50.7% of rural households there are poor with conditions worst in the northern Amazon where oil exploitation occurs (SENPLADES 2013: 113, 376). Nonetheless, poverty is widespread throughout the Amazon region, affecting all five provinces, unlike other regions of Ecuador (i.e. Coast, Sierra, Galapagos) where poverty tends to be concentrated in certain areas. Amazonian poverty reflects chronic neglect by the state over decades, coupled with the pervasive adverse impacts of oil exploitation (see Chapter 4). In this light, the PSB has become a belated form of assistance to the rural population there.

But such help does not come without strings attached. In return for funding support, the PSB imposes hitherto unprecedented control over the territory via legal instruments and the sorts of information gathering noted above. This material ordering of the

territory in turn deftly would be reinforcing the dual objectives of sustainable development – viz., the simultaneous exploitation and conservation of nature. But, in fact, the PSB is part of the state's production of nature either for future green markets or for conventional ones (i.e. oil and mining industries). Indeed, for national government, the Amazon is a key strategic region for natural resources (mainly oil and minerals, but also forests as carbon sinks) that underpin development plans including the effort to move to a 'post-extractive' economy based on manufacturing and services (SENPLADES 2009, 2013; see Chapter 4).

PBS-linked activities are hence vital to long-term national plans and dreams. As one mainstream environmentalist working in SENPLADES put it bluntly, such state planning aims to order such strategic space so as to “not destroy the whole country” (Government officer 2, 2013); more to the point, areas with oil and mining resources are ‘zones of sacrifice’ where the “tension between rights of nature and extractivism remains unresolved”, as the human right to ‘develop’ confronts the rights of nature (Government officer 2, 2013). In this sense, state territory production aims precisely to define areas that will couple with traditional, fossil fuels markets while reserving some areas for proxy future green markets. The national produced territory therefore results in a mosaic of the state's various intentionalities in tension with local forms of territory production (an example of such local forms is Tola Chica community, the focus of Chapter 7).

Such pronouncements point out the vital role played by the PSB in territory production for the 'national good' under capitalism (Scholar 6, 2013; Scholar 7, 2014; see also Machado 2012). Here, nature conservation should occur inside the national system of protected areas (and specifically within PSB conservation areas), while industrial activities occur elsewhere. And yet, 18% of the national system of protected areas is already affected by oil extraction, as the extraction of oil and minerals clearly is not prohibited inside PSB conservation areas, as mentioned above (Government officer 1, 2013; Figure 5.2).

The outcomes of this conflicting situation are serious. For instance, it is important to assess whether or not the transference of funds to rural populations bound to a contract with the state (such as the PBS Conservation Agreement) may have follow-on consequences in terms of how landowners maintain, or are expected to maintain, relations with the state, let alone their possible willingness to oppose any state development plans that might lead to financial penalties. Much of this dynamic has yet to occur, pending the onset of oil exploitation in PSB areas and the development of

green markets, such as those related to REDD+ mechanisms. But yet, rather than ordering the territory to improve their management of the impacts of development (including poverty alleviation), it seems instead that state territory production aided by the PSB serves for the production of nature directly as commodities – either for green or conventional markets of oil and minerals - inside indigenous territories enrolled in the PSB. As Asiyambi reported for Nigeria, securing local residents' rights over the forests through land regularization is a pre-requisite for REDD+, which could lead to a “new exclusionary forest economy” namely “carbonized exclusion and elite accumulation” (Asiyambi 2016: 152). Either way, their full integration in the capitalist order seems foreordained. However, territory production by the state is not occurring without opposition; Chapters 6 and 7 will assess how other forms of territory production challenge the state's intentionality to imprint its plans on the ground by a thorough analysis of non-governmental environmental action and the contested production of an indigenous territory.

## 5.5 Summary

This chapter assessed the type of environmentalism deployed by an arm of the Ecuadorian State contained chiefly in the philosophy and practice of the *Programa Socio Bosque* (PSB) and framed by both the 2008 Constitution and the National Plan for Good Living (PNBV). The argument was constructed by analysing the major notions of *buen vivir*, the rights of nature, and territory.

The analysis emphasized the fact that, in the realm of state-related environmental activity, *buen vivir* was merely a synonym for sustainable development. Meanwhile a specific understanding of the notion of rights of nature helps to justify a scientific administration of nature for development. Both notions are used in this way to support technocratic environmentalism. The PSB produces nature in accordance with such environmentalism: it produces ‘first’ nature directly as a commodity, for emerging but powerful internationally-oriented REDD+ and carbon markets while, at the same time, ‘second’ nature is to be sold in conventional markets (i.e. fossil fuels or minerals). The production of ‘second nature’ is illustrated by the fact that the PSB does not exclude oil or mining industries from the areas it claims to conserve. Finally, the Chapter suggested that in order to be able to produce nature for green or conventional markets, the PSB is also part of the state's territorial production by helping to order the Ecuadorian space – making the country 'safe' for capitalism, as it were. Its role here was seen to revolve around the important regularisation of land tenure as well as the introduction of an array of territorial ordering instruments and surveillance systems,

particularly in the Amazon and within indigenous territories. Again, the production of nature for green or conventional markets is asserted, revealing the PSB as a business-as-usual mechanism disguised as technocratic environmentalism. This in turn evinces the power relationships inside the state, with the promoters of the PSB clearly pursuing the simultaneous objectives of nature conservation and poverty alleviation (Erazo 2015).

Much of this chapter has painted a gloomy picture showcasing how the Ecuadorian State, notably via the PSB, has been involved in a process of painting the country 'green', even as it has quietly asserted that it is business-as-usual across the land. State's territorial production has not occurred without opposition. It is therefore to this matter that the PhD now turns, assessing first of all the role and ideas of civil society groups encompassing both mainstream non-governmental environmentalists as well as more critical ecologists (Chapter 6), before engaging with the role of indigenous thought and practice concerning the production of an indigenous territory via a detailed case study of Tola Chica community (Chapter 7).

## **Chapter 6 The Ecuadorian non-state environmentalism**

Chapter 5 assessed state-linked environmentalism, in turn, this chapter analyses the multiple approaches to *buen vivir*, nature and territory taken within Ecuadorian non-governmental environmental organizations to assess how far and in what ways these notions contribute to a coherent political strategy for such actors to oppose the advance of state-related green capitalism in the country. The account here intertwines with the dynamics of indigenous struggle, inasmuch as indigenous peoples are routinely presented by environmental activists as staunch defenders of the rights of nature even as indigenous territories are seen as genuine spaces in which *buen vivir* occurs. Indeed, late in the chapter, I address proposals for forest conservation emanating directly from indigenous writers, thereby highlighting the crucial role of territorial autonomy and ‘community’ in such thought; having done this, the stage will be set for the detailed analysis of the indigenous community of Tola Chica contained in Chapter 7.

### **6.1 A politicised environment: diverse environmentalisms**

Chapter 4 described the crucial role of NGOs and grassroots organisations in the emergence of environmental awareness in Ecuadorian society and the continuous efforts of such organisations on environmental issues over time. It also explained the current structure of non-state environmental action organised around two main networks: the National Environmental Assembly (Asamblea Nacional Ambiental or ANA) and the Ecuadorian Committee of Organizations for the Defence of Nature and the Environment (Coordinadora Ecuatoriana de Organizaciones para la Defensa de la Naturaleza y el Medio Ambiente or CEDENMA). Recall that ANA gathers together grassroots organisations that are affected by capitalist development projects and environmental NGOs, while CEDENMA groups together environmental NGOs only. Across the chapter, the analysis will tackle environmental organizations that are part of both networks, drawing attention to two of them: EA and PF, as fieldwork conducted for this PhD showed that only these NGOs actively use the notions under investigation and have constructed a critique of the *Programa Socio Bosque* (PSB).

#### **6.1.1 Diversity in non-governmental organizations**

The Ecuadorian non-governmental organizations investigated for this PhD, stand against the extractive industry but approach market-based alternatives to extractivism differently. Certainly, there is a general agreement among both networks’ members about the exploitative character of a development model based on natural resource extraction – mainly oil and metallic minerals - and the urgent need to transition towards

a post-extractive model (ANA 2008, 2013; Morales 2009). For example, both networks submitted proposals to the 2007 ANC, the starting point of which was a severe critique of the extractive model. Thus, CEDENMA declared:

We affirm that the development model put forward by the Ecuadorian government responds to private interests and stimulates the endless extraction of natural resources, setting aside thereby intra and intergenerational equity (CEDENMA 2008: 1).

Similarly, ANA affirmed: “The people of Ecuador note that the conventional development model promoted by the Ecuadorian State was based on the extractive model which has generated the highest levels of social exclusion and inequality” (ANA 2008: 37). This critical stance lies at the base of the emergence of the environmental awareness in the country (see Chapter 4), and remains as the main feature of critical ecologism (see below).

In contrast, the position about applying market-based or financial strategies for nature conservation as alternatives to, for example, oil extraction, is more complicated: while ANA displays discomfort towards and even rejects the PSB, PES schemes and REDD+, CEDENMA’s standpoint is more ambivalent. Compare, for example, two statements made by them on this topic. On the one hand, there is ANA:

We reject the commodification of life through mechanisms [such as] ecosystem services and carbon markets, which have created a new exchange unity – the carbon tonne – to control the territories of the ancestral peoples, transforming nature into a new commodity and reducing the climate change issue to a new capitalist business (ANA 2013: 4).

On the other hand, there is CEDENMA: “biodiversity, its components and services, and natural resources are the patrimony of the nation, and the state must exercise the right to administer and manage them” while there must also be “mechanisms for economic compensation for ecosystem services provision” (CEDENMA 2008: 1, 6).

So, while non-governmental environmentalists agree in opposing the extractive industries (namely oil and minerals extraction), different stances emerge whilst speaking of *pathways* towards a post-extractive economy (NGO member 22, 2013; NGO member 23, 2013). For the majority of NGO members I interviewed for this PhD, the post-extractive economy should rely on well-known sustainable development options, ranging from eco-business, ecotourism enterprises and biotechnology development to market-based conservation mechanisms, particularly payment for ecosystem services (NGO member 3, 2013; NGO member 12, 2013; NGO member 9, 2013) – exhibiting a techno-centric environmentalism aligned with market-optimism,

which is also constitutive of green capitalism. Yet this was anathema to groups linked to ANA. As an ex-president of CEDENMA put it:

It is clear that the convergent issues [of all environmentalists] are oil, mining and food sovereignty and that the divergent issues are those related to market-based mechanisms: environmental services, incentives for conservation and *Socio Bosque*. In ANA, for example, the Plurinational Federation of Communitarian Tourism (FEPTCE) questioned themselves for selling the landscape as an environmental service (NGO member 11, 2013).

For this interviewee, the contentious nature of the concept of payment for ecosystem services was the cause of the withdrawal of the NGO Ecological Action from CEDENMA in 2004 when discussing the Law of Biodiversity, while it continues to participate in ANA (NGO member 11, 2013; NGO member 13, 2013). This was a significant move by an important NGO. Indeed, EA's involvement in the 2007 National Constituent Assembly might even have influenced the inclusion of a prohibition on the private appropriation of ecosystem services in the Ecuadorian Constitution<sup>39</sup> (NGO member 12, 2013; NGO member 24, 2013). In the end, for EA, strategies such as PES are "desperate attempts of capital to give the impression that it is environmentally friendly, to develop an institutional arrangement to show concern for the generalised [environmental] crises; the green economy is the slogan, the letterhead of such change" (NGO member 22, 2013). For the environmentalists involved with this organization, initiatives like the PSB are an expression of green capitalism and "those who promote these strategies are capitalists; they believe that the market can save nature" (NGO member 23, 2013).

In contrast, those environmentalists that promote PES and other market-based mechanisms criticise EA's approach. For an interviewee who was involved in the first PES project in Ecuador, for instance, that approach is founded on a misconception:

They say that PES is a neoliberal tool for the commodification of nature. I don't understand these arguments. For me, they are tools for quantifying the impacts and benefits: the polluter pays, who conserves, gains. They are only financing mechanisms [...] they are too radical; their alternative is the social and solidarity economy (bartering, local markets with no intermediaries, non-for-profit exchanges), but sadly they fail to put it into practice (NGO member 12, 2013).

This approach to market-based mechanisms may set a unique categorization of non-governmental environmental organizations in both national networks. But sometimes, though, the battle lines are not so clear-cut as this. For instance, another member of CEDENMA and ANA, the Pachamama Foundation, is the only other environmental NGO aside from EA that criticises the PSB, albeit for its impacts on indigenous

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<sup>39</sup> Article 74 of the Constitution states: "Environmental services will not be the subject of appropriation; their production, use and exploitation shall be regulated by the state" (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Art. 74).



territorial rights rather than for its connection to green capitalism. And yet, this Foundation subscribes to the sustainable development narrative unlike EA. For example, one of the Foundation's employees (who was also holding the CEDENMA presidency at the time of my fieldwork) did not reject outright the PES mechanisms, pragmatically viewing them as “a form of transition beyond extractivism, towards a different society”. However, she recognised that “they are not the final solution [as], so far, the main beneficiaries of the PES mechanisms and carbon market are the same oil companies” (NGO member 1, 2012). For PF then, the transition to a post-extractive future would need to pass through green capitalism.

These sorts of precise doctrinal and strategic disputes often reflect a wider philosophical difference. As the environmentalist who headed CEDENMA at the time of the ANC in 2007 observed, there are two strands of Ecuadorian environmentalism: a techno-centric one that emphasises management and public policy, and a social justice one that prizes public participation and human rights, like PF and EA (NGO member 11, 2013). EA, in particular, pursues also a form of critical ecologism, namely, one that recognizes the interdependence of humans and nature while criticizes not only the capitalist system and its exploitative character but also techno-centric environmentalism (see section 6.2). Here, philosophy shades into politics: on the one hand, there are those environmentalists for whom the environment is a matter of political struggle and permanent confrontation in searching for social justice (i.e. the critical ecologists), and, on the other hand, those who prefer a technocratic and more reformist approach to *manage* emerging conflicts (i.e. the mainstream environmentalists). Put more bluntly, for the critical ecologists the environment is social and hence a matter of power relationships, while for techno-centric environmentalists the environment is a technical issue. Take for example what the environmentalist from CEDENMA quoted previously says about critical ecologists:

“[Those ecologists] do not propose dialogue for constructing proposals, for example laws, nor they want to discuss the benefits of PES; there are also ecologists that reject working with the government but are willing to be involved in [oppositional] party politics” (NGO member 11, 2013).

This disjuncture amongst environmental organizations in civil society is also important to the aims of this PhD since the politicised and critical ecologists are precisely those who are critical of green capitalist strategies – including the *Programa Socio Bosque* – and who actively use the terms at the centre of this study (that is, *buen vivir*, nature, territory) in their strategic practices. In contrast, the techno-centric environmentalists who claim not to be interested in politics even as they uphold sustainable development

thinking are neither familiar with nor interested in the main notions under scrutiny herein; theirs is not a praxis of critical engagement.

However, critical engagement can clearly be seen in the case of EA which places the politicised environment at the centre of its analysis, with social struggle, dissent and activism as key components of its work (NGO member 14, 2012; NGO member 22, 2013; NGO member 23, 2013; NGO member 26, 2014). This NGO is organised in 'campaigns' against different aspects of development that threatens human and 'non-human' nature: oil; mining; PES, PSB and REDD+; dams; deforestation and plantations; GMO and agribusiness (Ecological Action 2015). Hence, they work closely with rural communities as well as with the indigenous movement (e.g. CONAIE, ECUARUNARI and CONFENIAE) and assorted other social movements (e.g. Yasunidos, the Network of women defenders of nature *Saramanta Warmikuna*) (NGO member 24, 2013; NGO member 26, 2013; NGO member 28, 2013). Such a clearly political outlook has recurrently attracted the ire of the authorities. Thus, the NGO was reputedly threatened when the Ministry of Health temporally shut it down before being re-opened under the tutelage of the Ministry of Environment, an event that garnered this radical NGO the support of the international activist community (Klein 2009, Friends of the Earth International 2009).

Then, in a similar vein, there is the Pachamama Foundation, which had worked closely with the indigenous movement (e.g. CONAIE and CONFENIAE) and whose political lobbying was crucial in getting the rights of nature included in the Constitution (see below). The NGO had also been campaigning vociferously against oil extraction until December 2013, when in a highly controversial move, the Ministry of Environment abruptly shut it down. The justification that was given for this official closure was that the Foundation's work "interfered with national politics" and "threatened the internal security and peace" of the country (Ministerial Agreement #125 4/Dec/2013). This move was widely seen to be part of a much larger new state politics involving a growing crackdown on 'unruly' NGOs (NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 2, 2013; NGO member 8, 2013; NGO member 16, 2013). Indeed, as fieldwork conducted for this thesis shows, NGOs have seen a reduction in their ability to act independently in society as well as to influence environmental governance (NGO member 2, 2013; NGO member 10, 2013; NGO member 13, 2013); ominously, this had also been coupled

with a growing climate of persecution of environmentalists (NGO member 20, 2012; NGO member 23, 2012).<sup>40</sup>

This authoritarian lurch by government has alarmed many environmental organizations. For example, ANA members are more and more concerned about the decreasing spaces that are available for political participation as well as the increasing criminalisation of grassroots environmentalists, particularly those who oppose the extractive industry (NGO member 22, 2013; NGO member 28, 2013). As one activist put it during the 2013 ANA annual Assembly:

We are here in Assembly; we take a certain decision like to not permit oil extraction or mining in a community, but afterwards the presidential decisions come; as simple as that. Sometimes in the *Sabatina*<sup>41</sup>, [President Correa] gives an order and unexpectedly the military, the police, come to our villages and say that we must comply because that's the way things are. So [public] participation is completely undermined; the power of the people. The democracy is not real (ANA Participant 2, 2013).

There is an irony in all of this. For some in civil society and the environmental organizations, the “return of the state”<sup>42</sup> after decades of neoliberal interventionism was seen in principal at least to be a positive thing insofar as it marked an effort to assert an Ecuadorian perspective in the face of a hostile globalisation process. And yet, the process has tragically signified rather an escalation of the state’s control of radical and independent-minded social organizations and NGOs, including reducing the latter’s access to international sources of funding – the key financial arena for the non-governmental sector (NGO member 2, 2013; NGO member 6, 2013; NGO member 7, 2013; NGO member 10, 2013). Hence, international cooperation is now centralised in the National Secretariat of International Cooperation (*Secretaría Técnica de Cooperación Internacional* or SETECI) even as all NGOs are subject to new regulations<sup>43</sup> that prohibit them from participating in political campaigning and increase the state’s capacity to intervene in their internal affairs (NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 8, 2013). Hence, a politicized understanding of the environmental issue – like that of EA - is jeopardized by this apparent governmental intention to depoliticize the environmental matter.

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<sup>40</sup> The country’s Public Defender reports on “a systematic criminalization of human and nature rights defenders that intimidates, neutralizes, inhibits and harasses any action against the state power” (Public Defender of Ecuador 2011: 3). In turn, Amnesty International reports: “The Ecuadorian system of criminal justice is being used to suppress protests against laws and governmental policies regarding natural resources use” (Amnesty International 2012: 3).

<sup>41</sup> *Sabatina* is a weekly TV broadcast report by President Correa (or the vice-president in his absence), transmitted on Saturdays from 10h00 to 13h00.

<sup>42</sup> The “return of the state” describes a post-neoliberal regime that “recovers the centrality of the state in the public action in five spheres: institutional innovation, planning, regulation and control, distribution and redistribution of wealth, and sovereignty” (SENPLADES 2010: 5).

<sup>43</sup> Executive Decree #16 “Regulation of the Unified Information System of social and civil organizations”, 4/Jun/2013; Executive Decree #982 published in the Official Registry #311, 8/Apr/2008. Pachamama Foundation was shut down based on Executive Decree #16.

Not surprisingly, many of my interviewees in the NGO sector reported a generalised feeling of hostility emanating from the current government toward them (NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 3, 2013; NGO member 11, 2013; NGO member 13, 2013; NGO member 22, 2013). Moreover, there is a lack of recognition of the historical contribution of NGOs as “the participation in NGOs is devaluated, cause [the government] says that we do not represent anyone” (NGO member 2, 2012; but also NGO member 6, 2013; NGO member 7, 2013). In general, they report an intolerance of those who dissent, resulting in a general reluctance to voice opinions as in the past (NGO member 8, 2013; NGO member 20, 2012).

At the same time, the on-going elaboration of the capitalist state has provoked a myriad of social conflicts that necessitate official intervention while inviting critical scrutiny from civil society groups (Environmental activist 5, 2013; Scholar 7, 2014). It is within this highly-charged context that the notions of interest to this thesis surface – *buen vivir*, the rights of nature and territory - all have become thoroughly intertwined with the anti-extractivist discourse to the point that anti-extractivism has subsumed the entire critical ecologist stance (see section 6.1.4).

Despite this worrying authoritarian turn by the Ecuadorian state, mainstream organisations are loath to become involved in any sort of ‘push-back’ by civil society. Indeed, for them, there is a wary rejection of pursuing the pathway of conflict – to such an extent that they tend to reject any involvement in politics due to a reductionist understanding of politics solely viewed as party politics (NGO member 5, 2013; NGO member 11, 2013;); their firm preference is for technocratic approaches (NGO member 3, 2013; NGO member 6, 2013; NGO member 7, 21; NGO member 9, 2013; NGO member 12, 2013). From this viewpoint, conflict and struggle, above all, are seen as active barriers to the construction of sensible and workable proposals, as “to look at everything in black and white damages working relationships” (NGO member 11, 2013).

Indeed, for many in the environmental NGO sector, the charge of being ‘political’ is quite detrimental, because change will only ever come about in their view as a result of an acquired individual consciousness concerning ecological crises, a conception close to ecocentric views. Listen here to a well-known naturalist, currently Director of Quito Zoo and a member of CEDENMA:

In Ecuador, the politics is polarised. The government discourse is false and the resistance is aggressive. The solutions will not come from an environmentalism that makes visible the bad [impacts of development], but from people acquiring environmental consciousness (NGO member 5, 2013).

From such divergent appreciations of the role of politics in environmentalism springs an equally divided reaction to the notions being studied in this thesis and indeed green capitalism as a whole. As was already said, EA and the (now defunct) Pachamama Foundation were the only two NGOs found to be actively using the terms *buen vivir*, the rights of nature and territory in their everyday practice. In contrast, mainstream environmentalists are reluctant to use these terms, typically environmentalists affiliated to CEDENMA and ANA proved to be reluctant to speak about *buen vivir* and rights of nature, albeit for a diversity of reasons. However, as we will see, mainstream environmentalists tend to merge the ideas into talk of sustainable development and the scientific administration of nature (thereby echoing what state environmentalists do, as shown in Chapter 5), while the critical ecologists tend to use the terms for defining a post-extractive society as if it were a political system in itself. So next the chapter turns to narrate how the notions arrived into the Constitution to then explore how environmentalists and critical ecologists use the terms in the way described. This in turn will frame the subsequent analysis whether the notions provide an understanding of nature and territory that could in turn help to develop an alternative politics to green capitalism.

#### **6.1.2 *Buen vivir* and the rights of nature: their way into the Constitution**

The 2008 Constitution of Ecuador was written by the 130 members of the National Constituent Assembly (ANC) between December 2007 and July 2008. The process considered proposals from diverse social sectors that according, to many commentators, resulted in the inclusion of the quite innovative notions that are of interest of this thesis: the rights of nature or *pachamama* and *buen vivir* as a new political regime (SENPLADES 2009, 2013, Acosta 2013a). Indeed, when the Constitution was finally approved by a referendum, various scholars presented the inclusion of these seemingly transformative ideas in it as a triumph of the critical ecologists in convergence with the indigenous movement (Gudynas 2009, Acosta and Martínez 2011). Yet my fieldwork has suggested a much more differentiated level of engagement of the indigenous and environmental organisations within them in the Constitutional process, particularly amongst environmentalists (NGO member 21, 2012; NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 2, 2013; NGO member 11, 2013; NGO member 12, 2013). To some extent, this was linked to the contested character of the Constitutional process itself. Yet it was also a matter of how different environmental NGOs felt about these ideas as well as their related (un)willingness to articulate political strategies.

According to various interviewees, *buen vivir* was introduced into the Ecuadorian Constitution “to give voice to the indigenous peoples” (NGO member 1, 2012; but also NGO member 24, 2013). However, there is uncertainty among the interviewees in relation to the origin of the notion within the Constitutional discussions. As was said, during 2007, various social movements prepared proposals to be considered by the National Constitutional Assembly (ANC), and intense lobbying occurred to promote this or that proposal. For an EA member who participated in the ANC as an adviser:

The indigenous movement had a permanent lobby in the ANC, with a permanent office there, but their first proposal didn't mentioned *buen vivir* or *pachamama*. For the indigenous movement, the crucial aspect was the plurinational state. In any case, they apply the three concepts now. *Buen vivir* was proposed in the commission that discussed development and was rapidly accepted without opposition (NGO member 24, 2013).

CEDENMA's president at that time concurred with this view, arguing that “some Assembly members proposed *buen vivir*”, while simultaneously claiming that “I think that CONAIE was not involved back then because today, sometimes, they do not want to take over the concept” (NGO member 11, 2013). Indeed, the position of the indigenous movement regarding *buen vivir* actually became controversial over time, with a growing number of indigenous leaders seeing it as a “distraction from the important issues, like the plurinational state” (Indigenous representative 3, 2013).

Nonetheless, *buen vivir* was introduced into the Constitution in the end as a term purportedly rooted in the Andean-Amazon indigenous cosmovision (see Chapters 1 and 4), and, as such, was used politically by both official agencies (see Chapter 5) and by some civil society environmentalists. For example, a Pachamama Foundation member, who was holding the CEDENMA presidency at the time of my fieldwork for this thesis, described the origins of the term:

I saw *buen vivir* defined as ‘harmony with nature’ for the first time in the Sarayaku's<sup>44</sup> plan of life, but I know that [various other] indigenous companions had used the term for a long time. The notion exists in the Kichwa world and in other indigenous groups as well (NGO member 1, 2012).

In contrast, an indigenous representative affirmed that “the term appeared for the first time in a World Bank document prepared by a Sarayaku leader” (Indigenous representative 3, 2013; but also NGO member 14, 2012; see also Altmann 2013b, Hidalgo-Capitán *et al.* 2014).

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<sup>44</sup> Sarayaku is a sub-group of the indigenous people of the Kichwa nationality whose territory is found in the Southern Amazon region of Ecuador.

Certainly, this appeal to the indigenous origins of the term may have helped gain wide support for its approval at a time of social and political upheaval and change (NGO member 24, 2013). It was also important that the lobbyists inside the ANC made *buen vivir* the point of convergence between the indigenous and environmental movements. For instance, “ANA and CEDENMA supported *buen vivir* as the development model that framed the rights of nature” (NGO member 1, 2012) because it represented “the historical result of indigenous struggles, which environmentalists support” (NGO member 20, 2012). Hence from the start, it has been seen as a political term “whose pertinence is given by the historical moment [in which] it emerged” (Indigenous representative 3, 2013) and which “now we must decide how to use it” (Indigenous representative 2, 2013).

Yet, as noted, the outcome was that most mainstream environmentalists simply ignored the inclusion of *buen vivir* and the rights of nature in the 2008 Constitution (NGO member 9, 2013, NGO member 12, 2013), while critical ecologists stand alone with its use. Again, this appears related to how the notions were first introduced in the discussion during the ANC and how they relate to each other. For example, my fieldwork revealed that Pachamama Foundation first introduced the notion of the rights of nature; to then negotiate with other parties like EA and the indigenous movement led by CONAIE.

Certainly, the idea of the rights of nature was in fact influenced by the notion of *rights* from United States environmentalism (NGO member 22, 2013; NGO member 24, 2013), which “traditionally focuses on environmental justice confronting environmental problems through litigation and tools of command and control” (NGO member 12, 2013). Moreover, it was argued, the idea of the rights of nature was also rooted in the tradition of animal rights, which likewise has a US origin (NGO member 24, 2013). Indeed, PF was able to draw on this international connection to fund the allocation of a permanent lobbyist inside the ANC in order to actively promote the rights of nature with the Assembly members as well as to organise conferences and workshops with experts from the United States to further its aims. For one interviewee:

[The notion of rights of nature] wasn’t being discussed between environmentalists. I think that it emerged with the Pachamama Alliance<sup>45</sup>, and particularly with Bill Swift, who was working with the Achuar [people]. From a Western vision, he wanted to give the Achuar tools for defending their territory and for resisting the incursion of oil companies; so he taught them English and helped them develop communitarian

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<sup>45</sup> The Pachamama Foundation was the local partner of the international Pachamama Alliance, “a San Francisco-based citizen organization dedicated to preserving the earth’s tropical rainforests by empowering local indigenous people” (Charman 2008: 131).

tourism projects. Bill took the romantic strands of the Achuar thought and brought experts in the rights of nature from the United States (NGO member 12, 2013)

During the many months of negotiation surrounding the production of the 2008 Constitution, PF personnel were thus able to work closely with the key players in the environmental and indigenous movements including, for instance, meetings with CEDENMA and ANA members, who were negotiating for the recognition of the intrinsic value of nature (NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 11, 2013), and with EA members, who were close to the indigenous movement and to the ANC's president, Alberto Acosta (NGO member 2, 2013; NGO member 24, 2013), himself considered to be an internationally-known ecologist (NGO member 4, 2013). The interaction of all these actors produced new conceptual linkages such as deployment of the term *pachamama* "to strengthen the rights of nature" notion (NGO member 15, 2013; also NGO member 11, 2013; NGO member 14, 2012) and the articulation of the rights of nature to *buen vivir* and with the plurinational state, the latter being a well-known demand of the indigenous movement (NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 24, 2013).

But prior to the ANC deliberations, the notion of the rights of nature was entirely absent as an idea from discussions inside ANA and CEDENMA (NGO member 2, 2013; NGO member 13, 2013; NGO member 21, 2012). Any reference that did exist then to the matter of rights was the question of how "to deepen the individual and collective environmental rights granted in the 1998 Constitution" (ANA 2008: 13), such as the right to live in a healthy and pollution-free environment and the obligation of the state to conserve nature (which were in any case already recognised in the 1983 Constitution, see Republic of Ecuador 1983<sup>46</sup>, Art. 19, Section 2), the right of indigenous peoples to be consulted about development in their territory, as well as asserting the human right to clean fresh water (NGO member 24, 2013).

Hence, and while EA and PF were signed up to the notion, the other environmentalists were not (NGO member 2, 2013). To the contrary, this issue clearly rankled some of them, since the proposal of rights of nature was not discussed collectively:

ANA and CEDENMA had meetings for discussing and preparing their demands, where neither *buen vivir* nor rights of nature were discussed; we had, as a social movement, a proposal for changing the development model for one not based on oil, mining, monocultures, GMO free, etc. [The rights of nature] were accepted with no reflection, without producing something of our own; it is just another fancy concept, like ecosystem services or buffer zones (NGO member 13, 2013).

In the end, for environmentalists aside PF and EA the issue was that the rights of nature and *buen vivir* did not emerge from the environmental networks as such and

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<sup>46</sup> Official Registry #569, September 1st, 1983.



hence appeared alien to them (NGO member 21, 2012; NGO member 11, 2013). In fact, they came about as a result of multifaceted political lobbying and strategizing undertaken during the ANC (NGO member 11, 2013; NGO member 13, 2013; NGO member 24, 2013; see Chapter 4). And most mainstream environmentalists simply ignored the inclusion of *buen vivir* and the rights of nature in the 2008 Constitution (NGO member 9, 2013; NGO member 12, 2013). That being said, next, we will be exploring how mainstream environmentalists refashioned the notions into sustainable development and the scientific administration of nature, as the state-related environmentalists did. Then the Chapter will assess how critical ecologists who *have* engaged with these ideas deploy them, notably in wider efforts to confront the technocentric environmentalism, as well as how they construct the critique of the PSB and promote a new configuration of human-nature relationship that is antithetical to green capitalism.

### 6.1.3 Mainstream environmentalism in action

I reported earlier that most environmentalists were not discussing *buen vivir* or the rights of nature at the time the new Constitution was being discussed, as well as since then. In fact, their attention was elsewhere: they developed a multifaceted critique of the development model based on the extraction of natural resources, an agrarian model that favoured agribusiness, the unequal and unjust distribution of oil revenues, the homogenisation of cultures, and the unequal insertion of Ecuador into the global market (ANA 2008; Morales 2009; NGO member 4, 2013). The president of CEDENMA explained the discussion being held in these terms:

In CEDENMA's proposal [to the ANC], we didn't talked about *buen vivir*, but a sustainable and equitable society [...] When we went to the ANC, we met with the Pachamama Foundation, which wasn't yet a member of CEDENMA. They were presenting the rights of nature idea. At some point, all the proposals converged, but it wasn't something we were discussing (NGO member 11, 2013).

So, for CEDENMA's members, the *buen vivir* notion was rapidly assumed as a synonym of sustainable development (NGO member 6, 2013; NGO member 7, 2013; NGO member 8, 2013). They also pointed out that *buen vivir* is an alien idea (NGO member 6, 2013) that is too easily manipulated by political interests (NGO member 7, 2013), too broad (NGO member 5, 2013), incomprehensible (NGO member 3, 2013), barely defined (NGO member 2, 2013; NGO member 4, 2013), and still needing "to articulate the mechanisms to achieve it" (NGO member 11, 2013), but one that ultimately will help to "better manage the natural resources with the assistance of the economical and ecological sciences" (NGO member 9, 2013). Hence, "it is the rational use of natural resources for development" (NGO member 7, 2013). Thus, as already

noted, many non-governmental environmentalists, as with those environmentalists working for the government, seemed to be more comfortable with sustainable development terminology and tools – hence the rapid assimilation of *buen vivir* into the more familiar sustainable development conceptual universe, which informs a type of technocratic environmentalism.

In fact, *buen vivir* was advanced at the time of the constitutional deliberations as a critique of “development” based on an alternative way of life inspired by the livelihoods of Andean-Amazonian indigenous people (see Chapter 1). Hence its value resided above all in this realm: “the critical theorists of development and coloniality and the indigenous movement – particularly ECUARUNARI - sustained it. The point of departure was that a different term was seen to be needed to confront development” (NGO member 24, 2013). For their part however, most environmentalists did not abandon pursuance of development, then or since. This can be seen in the recollections of the president of CEDENMA at the time the Constitution was developed who opined that environmental participants “positioned general issues regarding the development model, but also practical issues of environmental management” (NGO member 11, 2013). In this view, *buen vivir* might entail a *different* development model, but it certainly was not a rejection of it altogether.

This is also true for ANA’s members, which in turn reunites grassroots, local organizations. Hence during the 2013 ANA annual assembly, delegates representing peasant and indigenous peoples communities also did not reject development per se in their interventions, but rather sought its adaptation to encompass such things as cultural identity, a better national wealth distribution and increased popular participation in decision-making processes; as one delegate lamented, there was a “lack of political will to bring genuine development to communities and local territories” (ANA Participant 4, 2013) at a time when (as another delegate added) there was an urgent need “to look for other developing paths, that the transnational [companies] don’t put the proposals, but us” (ANA Participant 5, 2013). In demanding a greater role in state-managed issues, especially involving much needed limits on the operation of private capital around the country, they may be seen to be subscribing to a post-neoliberal regime to which *buen vivir* has been linked however not to a post-development one (see Radcliffe 2012).

Rather, grassroots organizations grouped in ANA are demanding the ability to control how they reproduce their material lives. Moreover, they challenge the way in which the state plans for development, by using their local knowledge and practices, intertwining

environmentalist thinking with indigenous knowledge-systems and worldviews – a classic form of popular ecologism. Take for example this intervention of ANA's president, who is also the leader of the organisation that seeks to protect the country's mangrove ecosystem:

With [President] Correa's model, we are not overcoming poverty. They don't see the future. What is needed is what we are doing: communitarian resource management. Instead of exploiting *more* oil and minerals, we must improve the current oil camps and infrastructure; promote agroecology; invest in small-scale agriculture; and improve rural life conditions: education, and health (NGO member 20, 2012).

Here, *buen vivir* represents a form of local, sustainable and cultural development, not a rejection to it. However, this sort of development is incompatible with the extractive industry, as the leader of the organisation heading the lawsuit against Chevron-Texaco<sup>47</sup> – and also a member of ANA – states: *buen vivir* will be a reality in the post-extractive future: "When we win the lawsuit, we will have *buen vivir*, clean water, ecological and social restoration, health" (NGO member 21, 2012).

The perceived dominance of the anti-extractivist sector over non-state-linked Ecuadorian environmental organizations was already explored in Chapter 4. Concordantly, mainstream environmentalists see the rights of nature as a viable legal tool by which to manage the extractive industries impact through appropriate scientific administration of nature (NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 2, 2013; NGO member 4, 2013; NGO member 20, 2012, Environmental activist 2, 2013). Here, they coincide with the state environmentalism analysed in Chapter 5, however without disguising technocratic environmentalism as business-as-usual development, but pursuing a real post-extractive economy through the adoption of green capitalist mechanisms.

On the contrary, critical ecologists appear to seemingly reject the extractivist economy but also ideas of sustainable development and the transition to a green capitalist future. Hence, next the Chapter turns to explore how the critical ecologists use the notions under investigation to figure out alternatives to the extractivist-based development and to challenge mainstream environmentalism as constitutive of green capitalism.

#### **6.1.4 Critical ecologism: post-extractivism and the critique to green capitalism**

It was already noted that the sole issue in which mainstream environmentalists and critical ecologists agree is in the urgency of transit towards a post-extractive society. For example, a key document produced during the 2013 ANA Assembly set out

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<sup>47</sup> The trial against Texaco (today Chevron-Texaco) began in 1993. It confronted 30,000 people affected by the operations of the oil company between 1967 and 1992 in Ecuadorian Northern Amazon (Fontaine 2007). In 2012, an Ecuadorian court upheld the conviction against Chevron-Texaco (merged in 2001) (Delgado-Ramos 2013a: 326).

demands focused on overcoming the prevailing economic model based on the extraction of natural resources (especially oil and minerals) in order to respect the rights of nature (ANA 2013). Similarly, CEDENMA rejected the “development model based on the exploitation of nature” through extractivism (CEDENMA 2008: 1) while its president at the time when the Constitution was being discussed observed that “a sustainable and equal society is without extractivism. We need to change the energy matrix, and to establish new forms of production” (NGO member 11, 2013).

In a similar vein, both EA and PF have assimilated *buen vivir* to it being an essential part of the vision for a post-extractive economy (NGO member 22, 2013; NGO member 24, 2013), almost as if it were a novel political system in-and-of-itself (Scholar 6, 2013). But for PF this assimilation occurs without completely giving up on the idea of sustainable development. Listen, for example, to a member of PF who was also the president of CEDENMA at the time of my fieldwork:

*Buen vivir* is a development model not based on extractivism. It is not capitalism or socialism; it is *buen vivir*. To live well, not better. Harmony with nature means to recognise the limits of nature. Together with the rights of nature and the plurinational state, they form a triangle: *buen vivir* is the goal and the other two concepts are the basis of it; they are tools by which to achieve *buen vivir* (NGO member 1, 2012).

Of course, for this Foundation, the term is strongly linked to indigenous territorial rights and the assertion of an indigenous way of life and cosmovision (NGO member 15, 2013). Again, this is the kind of popular ecology or ‘ecology of the livelihoods’ (see Chapter 2) whose purpose is to protect the material bases of human reproduction, derived from the rejection of the extractive economy but which does not necessarily reject development. Moreover, by appealing to the possibility of harmonizing the rights of nature with development, it shows a techno-centric character as well.

For EA, meanwhile, “*buen vivir* is [...] a model that does not destroy nature” (NGO member 24, 2013). Members of this NGO point out that this is the crucial difference between, and an important point of confrontation with, environmentalists working in the government, who see no contradiction between oil and mineral extraction and forest conservation (NGO member 23, 2013; NGO member 26, 2013). In fact, for one such interviewee, the challenge is precisely “to dispute the [*buen vivir*] concept [in order to avoid] the risk of co-optation and refashioning into sustainable development or corporate social responsibility” linked to the extractive industry (NGO member 22, 2013).

The rights of nature idea underwent a similar path. It was already noted that the motion of rights of nature originates in the Pachamama Foundation’s work with the indigenous

peoples of the Southern Amazon in developing alternatives to oil extraction (Government officer 2, 2013; NGO member 11; NGO member 12, 2013; NGO member 13, 2013). In short, the rights of nature recognition in the 2008 Constitution came about during the ANC against the backdrop of the environmental history of the country strongly marked by the struggle against oil extraction (NGO member 11, 2013; NGO member 13, 2013; NGO member 24, 2013; see Chapter 4). As one critical ecologist succinctly put it: “the rights of nature assemble much of our work and experience [against the oil industry] that’s the contribution; [the concept] is a strategy for fighting” (NGO member 21, 2012).

Thus, and as with *buen vivir*, the rights of nature came to represent a tool of struggle in the larger battle for a post-extractive future. But, unlike state-linked and non-state mainstream environmentalists, who assume the rights of nature as a viable legal tool by which to manage the extractive industries impacts through appropriate scientific administration of nature (NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 2, 2013; NGO member 4, 2013; NGO member 20, 2012), for critical ecologists the rights of nature will serve to *stop* the extractive industry (Environmental activist 3, 2013). Similarly, the president of ANA at the time I conducted fieldwork for this PhD affirmed that the term of the rights of nature serves “for the formal fights, for example, legal actions, to stop the environmental destruction, to protect the ecosystems from devastation” (NGO member 20, 2012). Indeed, for critical ecologists, the rights of nature were seen from the very beginning as an instrument for confronting the extractive industries and struggle in favour of environmental and social justice (NGO member 24, 2013). It is in this way that EA and PF have both actively been using the notion over the years.

Consider, for example, the tellingly-named case of the “First Rights of Nature and the Rights of Mother Earth Ethics Tribunal” held in Quito in January 2014. This event brought together critical ecologists, human rights defenders and indigenous peoples from across Ecuador, as well as representatives from as far afield as India, the United States, South Africa, Argentina and Canada. Nine cases were heard at this First Tribunal, six of which were related to oil or mining industries (Viale *et al.* 2014). The Second Tribunal, convened in Lima in December 2014, heard 12 cases, of which eight were related to oil or mining (Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature 2015). In parallel with such internationally-connected and high-profile collective efforts by civil society to advance serious change in Ecuador, EA and PF (at least until its closure) have engaged in various efforts to present legal cases in defence of the rights of nature in order to compel the national legal system to consider nature as the subject of rights (NGO member 24, 2013; NGO member 27, 2013). To date, three cases have been

presented before the Ecuadorian courts, two of which sought to defend ecosystems against attack by extractive industries (see Kauffman and Martin 2017 for a comprehensive assessment of these and other cases).

Ponder these three cases in a bit more detail. The first one was presented in March 2011 by two citizens in defence of the Vilcabamba River in the Southern Ecuadorian Andes and against the local government, which was extracting stone material from the riverbank for constructing a road. In the end, the court “ruled in favor of the Vilcabamba River, making it the world’s first successful Rights of Nature lawsuit” (Kauffman and Martin 2017: 136), ordering the local government to cease road-work and to restore the river. A landmark decision, it has nonetheless been the sole successful case to date. Thus, the second case was presented in January 2013 against the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Non-renewable Resources and a Chinese mining company for violating the rights of nature by authorising the first large-scale mining project in Ecuador. Filed by a coalition of groups including CONAIE, ECUARUNARI CONFENIAE, two human rights NGOs, CEDENMA, EA and PF (CONAIE *et al.* 2013), the case was summarily dismissed by the court in June 2013 (NGO member 1, 2012). Meanwhile, an ecologist defence organisation (Yasunidos), EA and a local indigenous pastor together filed the third case in November 2014 against the promoter of a monoculture pine tree plantation, and in defence of the *paramo* ecosystem (Kauffman and Martin 2017). Once again, the demand was dismissed leaving the activists to fall back on the appeal process (NGO member 27, 2013).

In this way, then, EA and PF work with indigenous organisations in deploying the notion of the rights of nature as a legal tool “to prevent pollution and destruction of water, forests, paramos, rivers, mangrove forests and food production areas” (Ecological Action 2015) arising from extractive activities. But, as was already noted, a difference does appear between the two main NGOs that are the leading subject of analysis in this chapter. Thus, for some members of EA, the rights of nature are mainly seen as a legal tool by which to contest the hegemonic capitalist development model (NGO member 22, 2013; NGO member 24, 2013; NGO member 26, 2013); as another interviewee put it, the notion is “necessary to confront a state that reproduces the capitalist system” (NGO member 4, 2013). Contrary to this, for Pachamama Foundation members, the rights of nature is an idea that holds a wider import: it is indeed a “way to reach *buen vivir*” (NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 15, 2013). Hence, for this Foundation, *buen vivir* is not entirely decoupled from the notion of sustainable development.

Such action occurs in a context of sharpening confrontation with the regime of President Correa as the latter has placed the extraction of raw materials at the centre of the officially-sanctioned development model. Therefore *buen vivir* and the rights of nature used as tools against the extractive industry appear at the centre of a sub-form of critical ecologism that reduces its actions to anti-extractivism and hence struggles pursuing a post-extractive economy as if it were a political system in-and-of-itself. It appears that political and social change will come simply by replacing fossil fuels addiction while pursuing for a more egalitarian society is somehow obscured by the fervour of the political dispute against oil extraction (Scholar 6, 2013; NGO member 16, 2013; NGO member 25, 2013). In addition, within this process, critical ecologists seem to be producing an idea of a non-human nature and an idealized static territory, thereby deepening the separation between humans and nature they sought to challenge in the first place. All of this suggests the limit of the anti-extractivist discourse – at least standing by itself - to configure a politically-effective alternative mechanism by which to dispute the hegemonic capitalist model, and its green version (NGO member 16, 2013; Scholar 6, 2013; see also Sánchez-Parga 2014 and below).

On the contrary, it appears that when both organizations oppose green capitalist strategies – i.e. the *Programa Socio Bosque* (PSB) - they acknowledge the produced character of nature and territory, unlike the anti-extractivist discourse in which the defence of a non-human nature and pristine territories are situated at the centre of the dispute. EA's critique of the PSB as part of a larger dynamic of mainstream environmentalism and of associated market-based mechanisms (NGO member 23, 2013, NGO member 26, 2013), suggests a new understanding of nature. Meanwhile the Pachamama Foundation's critique on the programme's impacts on indigenous territorial rights (NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 15, 2013) proposes an understanding of territory as socially produced. Both features of the critique will be developed in depth in the next sections, while next I explore the idea of nature that emerges from the notion of the rights of nature deployed by both critical ecologists and mainstream environmentalists. After that, the section will pass to analyse the vision of social nature that is contained in the *pachamama* term. These reflections will set up the scenario for the analysis of concrete forest conservation activity in the indigenous community of Tola Chica in Chapter 7.

## 6.2 Producing nature

### 6.2.1 Subjecting nature

The notion of the rights of nature advanced by critical ecologists transforms nature into a *subject* of rights (NGO member 4, 2013; NGO member 24, 2013, see also Gudynas 2009, Acosta and Martínez 2011). This idea is, for EA and Pachamama Foundation interviewees, the *greatest* contribution of the notion to confront mainstream environmentalism and for configuring an alternative to green capitalism. Thus CEDENMA's President and a member of Pachamama Foundation, for instance, affirmed her belief that "the rights of nature recognise nature as a subject, while other conservation mechanisms, like ecosystem services and commodification, transform nature into an object, again" (NGO member 1, 2012). Here, nature is still external to human activity and what is at stake is how to integrate it into human history: by commodification or by mystification. Moreover, turning nature into a subject does not necessarily result in the end of capitalist exploitation of nature, as the capitalist system is sustained precisely in the exploitation of subjects (see for example Federici 2004, Harvey 2004).

Nevertheless, the external nature prevails in many of the discussions held among other non-state environmentalists. For instance, take this declaration by a participant at the 2013 ANA Annual Assembly:

We cannot continue to be parasites and depend only on the *pachamama*, on nature. We should be able to find other ways [of living]. If we destroy the earth, the nature, our country, then we say let's do tourism, [but it will] not be possible in a polluted country, right? (ANA Participant 4, January 2013).

Here, nature not only remains outside of the human realm, it urgently requires systematic protection from *all* human intervention. This idea is widespread among the environmentalists of all strands. Hence, listen to what Alberto Acosta, former president of the ANC and enactor of the rights of nature, had to say at the First Rights of Nature Ethics Tribunal in 2014:

When we speak about the rights of nature, we are talking about the rights of mother earth, who is everywhere, and who is being affected everywhere by this unbridled capitalism. From this perspective, I could talk from a rational point of view and speak about biodiversity and say nature is a huge genetic bank; or I could talk from my heart and my imagination and say that [nature] is a huge Noah's Ark in our hands and we can't let it disappear (Acosta 2013b<sup>48</sup>).

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<sup>48</sup> Speech at the Rights of Nature Tribunal, Quito, January 18, 2013. Available at: [https://youtu.be/NvJfoEQI\\_eU?list=PLOGvWBI35TMZvt\\_cN3Fws1fuRaLst2oGY](https://youtu.be/NvJfoEQI_eU?list=PLOGvWBI35TMZvt_cN3Fws1fuRaLst2oGY)



This passage opposes the technocratic approach to nature to the ecocentric approach. In both cases, nature remains external. Similarly, the notion of the rights of nature has also been referenced by Ecuador's political leadership, highlighting an apparent contradiction with human rights. Thus, in August 2013, President Correa cancelled the Yasuni-ITT Initiative<sup>49</sup>, citing a lack of cooperation by the international community as well as the urgent human needs of the Ecuadorian population. When referring to the rights of nature in this context, he stated:

The greatest violation of human rights is extreme poverty, and the biggest mistake is to subordinate human rights to alleged rights of nature: no matter that there is hunger, a lack of services, what matters is a kind of extreme conservationism (Correa 2013).

This statement was a crucial critique of this notion in the government's eyes: namely, that an external nature's limits would only constrain human wellbeing, especially of the country's poorest. President Correa repeated this critique elsewhere (e.g. in his 2012 annual report – Correa 2012: 51; see also El Ciudadano 2010, August 10; Correa and Falconi 2012: 269), which has come to frame his confrontation with critical ecologists. Pushed into a political corner in this way so that they must apparently choose between humans and nature, the critical ecologists who refer to rights of nature fail to articulate a larger and socially-viable political proposal (Scholar 10, 2013).

For the few critical thinkers that challenge the notion of the rights of nature, the failure is due to poor activist judgement (NGO member 13, 2013; NGO member 16, 2013; NGO member 25, 2013). That is, the notion maintains and even boosts the idea of a non-human nature exploited by the capitalist system and in desperate need of protection from all human activity (NGO member 4, 2013; NGO member 22, 2013; NGO member 23, 2013; NGO member 24, 2013; NGO member 28, 2013). As one of these critics explained to me, "the rights of nature puts forward a non-use value of nature, of which we [humans] are not part. For me, advancing a non-use of nature is extremist conservationism" (NGO member 25, 2013). Again, this is apparently related to the origins of the idea in the anti-extractivist stance of critical ecologism, which proposed the idea of keeping nature away from all human intervention.

True, EA and PF have both claimed to not subscribe to an extreme conservationist stance; and yet, their allegiance to the notion of rights of nature nonetheless seems to leave them on the side of those who believe in a non-human and a nature-human dichotomy, as well as all the attendant socio-political implications that accompany it

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<sup>49</sup> The Yasuni-ITT Initiative was a national programme implemented so as to avoid oil extraction from a portion of Yasuni National Park (the ITT block) in the Amazon, in exchange for monetary compensation from the international community (Gallardo 2017).

(NGO member 16, 2013; NGO member 22, 2013; NGO member 25, 2013; Indigenous representative 1, 2012). One critic of these NGOs and also a member of CEDENMA, elaborated on the perceived problem here:

The rights of nature and the critique of development place humans in opposition to nature, and hide the real problem: the capitalist mode of production. The development critics say that the problem is the human-nature relationship and obviates the relations of production. It is a distraction that is functional to the system, as it fails to challenge it. It is a self-indulgent exercise [...] it was assumed that the rights of nature propel the interdependence [between humans and nature], but in fact the rights separate [humans and nature] again. The problem is that it insists on problematizing the relationship [of nature] with humans (NGO member 16, 2013).

Here, the idea of an external nature dilutes: nature is now seen as part of the production process, even of a mode of production based on natural resource extraction. This testimony entails a larger problematisation of overarching social relations of production in which nature is part. By assuming nature as produced by the prevalent social formation, it is forced to admit that in order to produce a more socially just nature it is necessary that the "transit towards a post-extractive economy [entails] that that economy [stops] to serve capitalist accumulation" (Scholar 6, 2013).

This critique is partly contained in EA's analysis of the PSB in connection to the international mechanisms of payment for conservation or PES as a green capitalist strategy. Such analysis evinces a geopolitics of environmental governance which allows the capitalist mode of production to expand into new areas via the private appropriation of territories as well as the production of new commodities, all under a 'green' image (Ecological Action 2012a: 123-128; also Ramos 2010). The critique of PES, particularly, relates to the reproduction of the dynamics of capitalist accumulation, which was of central interest during the 2013 ANA annual Assemblies (ANA 2013). By doing so, the critical ecologists challenge the production of first nature out of second nature and directly as an exchange value – as a commodity form. So again, this analysis forces thought in a more just mode of production of nature (Swyngedouw 2015).

So far, when speaking from an anti-extractivist stance, critical ecologists focus on how to recover a lost relationship between humans and non-human nature broken by the capitalist mode of production, highlighting the "interdependence" of the one with the other. Rather, the notion of nature being produced may be concordant with the notion of "oneness" of humans and nature, as advocated notably by indigenous representatives and as is said to be crystallized in the term *pachamama* (NGO member 1, 2012; see also the speeches of Pérez 2013, Gualinga 2014) and in the critical ecologists' critique of the PSB. Indeed, and delinked from the apparent cul-de-sac of

the rights of nature, *pachamama* may be seen to offer a more interesting approach, as long as it is not equated to ‘non-human’ nature but to social nature. As such, the next section assesses how far the articulation of *buen vivir* and *pachamama* can amount to a viable political alternative for critical ecologists and the indigenous movement.

### **6.2.2 *Pachamama* in critical ecologists and indigenous environmental politics**

The notion of rights of nature included in the 2008 Constitution, and used widely by critical ecologists, has thus been seen not to challenge the ultimately counter-productive human-nature separation – indeed, as various interviewees agree, it has actually reinforced it (NGO member 4, 2013; NGO member 16, 2013; NGO member 25, 2013; Scholar 6, 2013; Scholar 10, 2013). Yet that Constitution also presents a *possible* means to overcome the divide: the Andean-Amazonian notion of *pachamama*.

That being said, the Constitutional text does appear simply to assimilate ‘nature’ to *pachamama* on the only two occasions when the latter is mentioned. Thus, here is *pachamama* in the Preamble: “We, the sovereign people of Ecuador [...] celebrate nature, *Pacha Mama*, which we are part of and which is vital for our existence” (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Preamble; capital letters in the source). The equivalence also appears again, later, when referring to the rights of nature: “Nature or *Pacha Mama*, where life reproduces and realises, is entitled to fully respect of its existence and to the maintenance and regeneration of its vital cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes (Republic of Ecuador 2008, Art. 71, First paragraph; capital letters in the source).

In equating nature with *pachamama* in this manner, the Constitution fails to comprehend its highly complex character in the Andean-Amazon world (Indigenous representative 2, 2013; Indigenous representative 3, 2013; Indigenous representative 4, 2013; NGO member 1, 2012). The thesis will recurrently address this linkage below and in Chapter 7. Here, though, the aim is first to analyse how critical ecologists in particular have understood the notion, before thereafter assessing the views of indigenous representatives who, it will be seen, provide a quite different appreciation.

For critical ecologists who use the term, *pachamama* is also seen to be all-but synonymous with external nature (NGO member 6, 2013; NGO member 7, 2013; NGO member 8, 2013). True, there are intimations of a broader conceptualization of ‘cosmos’ or ‘life’ but for PF, and to some extent EA too, *pachamama* somehow imposes a limit to an otherwise infinite growth of the human economy based on the extractive industry (NGO member 15, 2013). But the conceptualization of nature

contained in the *pachamama* notion is not plain external nature as criticized by political ecologists (see Chapter 2): in the views of critical ecologists, the indigenous/local subject is legitimately integrated into *pachamama*, since it is only these people who live within the *buen vivir* regime, that is, in 'harmony' with nature (NGO member 30, 2013). Indigenous/local practices are hence thought to be harmless precisely because they remain within the limits of nature; hence, it is *only* when indigenous societies come into contact with the modern world (including, but not limited to, a capitalist-shaped world) that local practices may become harmful to nature (NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 15, 2013). This is a rather romanticist view of the matter, to say the least, that denies the social character of nature and the historic character of indigenous peoples.

Indeed, this sort of view obscures the basic point that indigenous peoples (as well as their territories and natures) are *already* deeply connected to the capitalist system, and hence are 'modern' too (Indigenous representative 3, 2013; NGO member 25, 2013). And yet, the two NGOs tended to persist over the years in advancing an essentialist appreciation of *pachamama* when contesting the extractive industries, which is, after all, the main reason underlying their use of the term in the first place (NGO member 26, 2013; NGO member 28, 2013). This process is related with the understanding of nature as external or universal, which ultimately presumes that nature is a static and unchangeable entity, without history and, according to Erik Swyngedouw, "serves as 'the Other' that guides us to redemption" (2015: 134).

Still, some of this group of critical ecologists exhibit a conception of nature – and of *buen vivir* – that has to be experienced in all its materiality to be fully comprehended, as social nature that is humanly produced through conceptualization as well as material action. Through understanding the materiality of the production of nature, critical ecologists may get closer to a social nature approach that contributes to an effective political proposal and away from mystification. For instance, a member of ANA suggests:

A romantic interpretation [of *pachamama*] is necessary as it requires compassion for other living beings [...] but there are some anti-scientific postures [among ecologists] in the effort of constructing an indigenous conception [of nature] to challenge ethnocentrism and racism. This should worry us. There are no concrete proposals, only mystical inclinations about "the indigenous". Happily, we have gone beyond the time when only one worldview existed, frequently imported from abroad, but we should be cautious and not impose, again, one vision. Some indigenous companions, for example, say: 'We experience *buen vivir*, we don't conceptualise it'. So there are pieces, elements of *buen vivir* but not an integrated proposal; we need their help for that. We also might remember that the indigenous are historical subjects, who have learnt from trial-and-error during the years; they are not static in time (NGO member 25, 2013).

Indeed, some of this chimes with some indigenous representatives who also call for an historical interpretation of their world and of the *pachamama* notion. Take, for instance, what a CONAIE's leader and Tola Chica community member has to say:

*Pachamama* is pertinent insofar as it is a historical concept, because it emerged in a given historical moment: when the indigenous movement shifted from fighting for land to struggle for the plurinational state. [This shift] might synthesise the indigenous movement's claims today, but you need to situate it historically; and having in mind the current [indigenous] *comunas*, the majority of which have been based, too, in capitalist relations of exchange for something like 20 years (Indigenous representative 3, 2013).

In this sense, he references the historical character of the indigenous world, particularly the Andean-Kichwa speaking world. Here, he claims, *pachamama* was in reality of a longer lineage, dating back to the 1970s as part of the cultural turn in the indigenous movement and the advancement of the plurinational state – with territorial autonomy – at the centre of national political dispute in this area (see Chapter 4). This testimony evinces the social and historical contentious character of the *pachamama* notion: as a form of understanding nature as socially produced. Building on this view is an indigenous woman, historical leader of the indigenous movement and an ambassador of CONAIE in many alternative international forums. She asserts that *pachamama* is intrinsically a political concept, whose inclusion in the Constitution was of great importance “in theoretical terms; now we must decide how to use it” (Indigenous representative 2, 2013).

So, in historicising the notion in *this* manner, *pachamama* may provide a better way in which to challenge the mainstream environmentalism that constitutes green capitalism than the notion of nature contained in the rights of nature. For Delfin Tenesaca, the president of ECUARUNARI at the time I began my fieldwork, *pachamama* locates humans *within* nature as far as it is “far more than a little piece of land, it is everything that exists” (Tenesaca 2013), while for other indigenous leader *pachamama* represents “the universe, which encompasses everything, including humans” (Indigenous representative 2, 2013). But it could also be seen as a form of universal nature, more akin of conceptions like Gaia (see Chapter 2). Indeed, to some extent, representatives of indigenous peoples continue to equate *pachamama* with universal nature when speaking about the impacts of the development model based on the extraction of raw materials. For example, throughout CONAIE's proposal to the 2007 ANC, *pachamama* is described as ‘nature’:

The economic proposal must promote the harmonious coexistence of people and peoples with each other and with nature. Biodiversity and nature are not commodities

to buy and sell and to irrationally exploit. Nature is *pachamama* and we are part of it; hence, the relationship with the natural elements must be respectful (CONAIE 2007: 21).

Such usage undoubtedly reflects the ways in which indigenous groups have formed strategic alliances with critical ecologists (such as EA) over the years such that a blurring of narratives has tended to occur (Scholar 2, 2013; NGO member 24, 2013; NGO member 1, 2012). This sort of encounter has been part-and-parcel of resistance to the encroachment of powerful extractive industries which threaten mainly indigenous territories and forms of life; hence, the indigenous world was posed in opposition to a highly destructive human activity (NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 28, 2013; NGO member 30, 2013) and, sometimes, as the “fetishized ‘Other’” (Swyngedouw 2015: 134). As part of the discursive and material struggle here, the indigenous subject living in that world was portrayed as being appropriately immersed in his or her natural surroundings, as well as being in possession of traditional (i.e. non-modern, anti-capitalist) knowledge and praxis; inescapably, this politically-driven representation obviated the modern character of indigenous peoples and hence any possibility that capitalism could also be locally grounded (NGO member 25, 2013; Scholar 6, 2013; Indigenous representative 3, 2013).

It is here that the notion of social nature may well be of more relevance, since it assumes that all nature is produced by historical modes of production. So what is at stake is to understand nature as socially produced to displace the conversation from preservationist ideas or technocratic mechanisms for a non-human nature conservation to the need of discussing the mode of production of nature (Smith 2007). That discussion is conducted in this thesis by the analysis of the state driven production of nature (reviewed in Chapter 5) or the communal production of nature (to be fully assessed in Chapter 7).

However, it is not that the notions (thus interpreted) are an imposition from outside by environmental NGOs. Rather, it is a political option willingly adopted by indigenous leaders and representatives (J. Gualinga 2013<sup>50</sup>, Indigenous representative 2, 2013). Indeed, the indigenous movement appears to be using the terms – rights of nature, *pachamama* and *buen vivir* - coupled with the critical ecologists’ rhetoric to push forward their historical demands, which include, but are not limited to, opposing extractivism. In this situation, when confronting extractive industries, and particularly the development model advanced by President Correa, the terms are widely used. We can cite by way of example the words of two prominent indigenous leaders. Franco

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<sup>50</sup> Welcoming words at the Uyantza ceremony, Sarayaku territory in the Amazon. February 10, 2013.

Viteri, president of the indigenous organisation of the Amazon (CONFENIAE), who comes from Sarayaku, a Kichwa territory renowned internationally for their stance against the oil industry, thus spoke in support of the second demand for the rights of nature, narrated above. He added: “We are not terrorists; we defend the Constitution, the rights of indigenous peoples, the rights of nature, the international treaties. We will stand until justice is made” (Viteri 2013<sup>51</sup>). In turn, Carlos Pérez, who was elected president of ECUARUNARI during my fieldwork and who comes from a region that will be affected by large-scale mining, discusses largely the notions and denotes the kind of ecologist and anti-extractive activist we are referring to:

Industrial development has not been able to resolve conflict, hunger, poverty or health. Rather, on the contrary, it has been the cause. [...] Here are two civilizational logics: the West, which exhibits capitalism, while we propose communitarianism and *Pachakamak*, *Wirakucha* and *Yakumamita*<sup>52</sup>. They have developmentalism, extractivism; we have *sumak kawsay*. They have logic, reason; we have feelings, symbols, emotions and affection. They have science and technology; we have wisdom. They have the strength to exploit the land; we preserve and care for it and we are guardians of our sacred Mother Earth. They are intoxicated, crazed and drunk for gold; we want water, we want life. [...] They say here is the representative democracy; we say we have the assembly-based democracy. They say we have the uni-national state; we have the plurinational state. They have one culture; we have multiculturalism. They have the monocultures, pesticides, GMOs; we have the *chakrita*<sup>53</sup> and environmental, cultural and natural biodiversity. The current regime says we are opposed to development; of course, we propose de-development. They say we are Indians who want to live in the past, almost savages they say (Pérez 2013<sup>54</sup>).

Here, the positioning of the indigenous knowledge and worldview as anti-extractivist, anti-development and place-situated may be perceived as adequate for the immediate political needs of both the critical ecologists and the indigenous organizations, particularly when confronting an extractive industry that will affect a particular location badly (Scholar 2, 2013; NGO member 4, 2013).

For a CONAIE representative who is also member of Tola Chica community, though, the notions are being used as part of an understandable strategy but at a cost since in “the fervour of the political dispute, they [thereby] become essentialist [ideas]”. Moreover, for him, *buen vivir* and the rights of nature are replacing debates about the plurinational state, which he considers more important, and “that’s why the indigenous

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<sup>51</sup> Speech during a rally in support of the legal case against the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Non-renewable Resources and a Chinese mining company for violating the rights of nature by authorising the first large-scale mining project in Ecuador. January 15, 2013.

<sup>52</sup> In the Kichwa language, *Pachakamak* and *Wirakucha* are gods. *Yaku* is water; *mamita* is a diminutive of mom (SEPDI 2009, Hidalgo-Capitán *et al.* 2014b).

<sup>53</sup> In the Kichwa language, *chakrita* is a diminutive of *chakra*: a small piece of land next to the household in which to grow food for household consumption (Hidalgo-Capitán *et al.* 2014b).

<sup>54</sup> Speech when Pérez took office as ECUARUNARI’s president, May 18, 2013. Available in: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRahNB1bc5U&list=PLOGvWBI35TMZvt\\_cN3Fws1fuRaLst2oGY&index=10](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IRahNB1bc5U&list=PLOGvWBI35TMZvt_cN3Fws1fuRaLst2oGY&index=10)

movement makes efforts to link all those concepts with the notion of community” (Indigenous representative 3, 2013).

Indeed, *pachamama* appears to be assumed as territory but only when it is understood also as social nature (Indigenous representative 2, 2013; Indigenous representative 3, 2013; Indigenous representative 4, 2013). For example, when Patricia Gualinga, an indigenous leader from Sarayaku community, was called as an 'expert witness' at the Rights of Nature Ethics Tribunal in January 2014, she was asked to explain *pachamama*, to which she replied:

In our traditions, we have been told that we have to be respectful of every living being: the tree, the anaconda, the eagle, and the ant, all of them. If we are hunters, we cannot hunt with anger, or just for hunting, we have to take only what we need to feed ourselves. If we make a *chakra*, we cannot grow a monoculture and depreciate everything; we have to take what is necessary and then allow the land to regenerate to then use it again (P. Gualinga 2014<sup>55</sup>).

To be clear, she is speaking about how the Sarayaku people administer – i.e. produce – their territory. Here, the idea of the territory production becomes stronger if it is understood from a social nature perspective – the production of nature as constitutive of the production of space (Smith 2010). So the struggle for indigenous territorial autonomy is a struggle for being able to produce the territory on to their own terms – and again, the struggle is about who decides how such production is done.

Accordingly, an indigenous representative from the Sierra relates *pachamama* with agricultural land, which is clearly laboured and produced: “When all the products are ready, we make a festivity with all the food; we make an offering to Mother Earth, for each year we get back to labour our Mother Earth” (Indigenous representative 6, 2013). As we will see in Chapter 7, the notion of a produced nature and territory is widespread amongst Tola Chica community members, being the forest part of such production and part of the ordering of the community’s territory. This form of forest conservation practice, framed by the notions under discussion in this thesis, will be assessed in the next and final section, as a possible alternative to the officially-driven *Programa Socio Bosque* and as part of territory production.

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<sup>55</sup> Public speech at the Rights of Nature Ethics Tribunal. Quito, January 2014. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EALiOZTxDnI&index=19&list=PLOGvWBI35TMZvt\\_cN3Fws1fuRaLst2oGY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EALiOZTxDnI&index=19&list=PLOGvWBI35TMZvt_cN3Fws1fuRaLst2oGY)



## 6.3 Producing territory

### 6.3.1 Critique of the PSB to configure territory production

Ecological Action and the Pachamama Foundation have constructed their critique of the *Programa Socio Bosque* (PSB), from similar but also different positions. EA views the PSB as part of the larger dynamic of mainstream environmentalism and of the associated sustainable development concept and market-based mechanisms such as PES. The NGO have assessed the impacts of those mechanisms on indigenous territorial rights and on the rights of nature, and campaign in favour of indigenous territorial autonomy, especially within the Amazon region (NGO member 26, 2013; NGO member 27, 2013). In turn, PF critique is focused exclusively on the programme's impacts on indigenous territorial rights (NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 15, 2013; NGO member 30, 2013).

EA's analysis of the PSB tends to lump the programme together in a crude fashion with other elements. Thus, for instance, it (mistakenly) equates the programme with a REDD+ initiative (Ramos 2010, Ecological Action 2010, 2012a). Beyond this, the critique follows a fairly standard line. First, it focuses on the erosion of indigenous rights. The community, says the critique, will have to cede control and management of the territory to the state through the Ministry of Environment. This, say the critical ecologists, means "that [the indigenous communities and peoples will] lose the rights over their territories, the forests, the water and the biological diversity, as well as their ancestral knowledge" (NGO member 26, 2013).

Meanwhile, PF strongly objects for its part to the implications of the PSB for the integrity of indigenous territories: specifically, as the payment mechanism favours families with private properties over those with communitarian properties, it opens up the possibility for the fracturing of territories, namely of collective land ownership (see Table 5.4). It also thereby ignores pre-existing community zoning and other cultural practices: "Indigenous peoples use certain zones of the territory for celebrating parties and rituals, others for growing a *chakra*, others for conservation, and so on; the PSB obviates this" (NGO member 1, 2012). Finally, the PSB is seen by the Foundation to be a source of conflict and corruption within many indigenous community organisations, as well as a cause of the rupturing of collective processes that are based more on trust than on monetary payment (NGO member 15, 2013). In sum, both critiques argue against the possibility of indigenous communities losing territorial autonomy, hence losing the possibility of producing territory on their own terms.

Beyond these points, the critiques of both NGOs raise grave concerns about the de facto role of the programme in facilitating extractive activities in indigenous territories, as analysed in Chapter 5 (NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 15, 2013; NGO member 23, 2013; NGO member 26, 2013). Thus, as one Pachamama Foundation member warns, the “[conservation] agreements have many punishing clauses and there is no guarantee against extractive activities. It may be a good initiative [for nature] conservation, but it can also be clientelist and facilitate mining concessions” (NGO member 15, 2013). Similarly, an EA member states:

Socio Bosque considers [the possibility of] a ‘voluntary resignation’ of people’s rights to their territories, [forcing them] to renounce to use, enjoy, control and manage their own lands. Meanwhile, the government could place water, biodiversity and vegetation as carbon stocks in international markets as environmental services, and even obtain financial resources. [It is also] a pathway for oil and mining exploitation (NGO member 23, 2013).

Thus both organizations evince the failure of the PSB as a forest conservation mechanism, arguing instead that it will promote the advancement of extractive industries and that it will jeopardize forest conservation inside indigenous territories. In that sense, the organizations highlight that the PSB may be a business-as-usual capitalist development project disguised as technocratic environmentalism, not ‘true’ green capitalism as was also argued in Chapter 5 (Böhm et al, 2012, Brand and Wissen 2013). From a production of territory perspective, this means that the indigenous peoples’ possibility of disputing the state’s hegemony in the production of territory will be constrained.

This political stance has had a wider impact insofar these views have permeated indigenous organisations, especially given the closeness of some indigenous leaders with EA and PF. Hence, it is the official position of both CONAIE and CONFENIAE to reject the PSB (CONAIE 2009, 2011, CONFENIAE 2009). That said, local community organisations are split on this matter with many of them having already enrolled in the PSB (Indigenous representative 1, 2012; NGO member 14, 2012; see Chapter 5).

However, in their critiques, critical ecologists have repeatedly highlighted the dangers of linking indigenous peoples and territories to the capitalist system through the PSB (NGO member 23, 2013; Ecological Action 2012a). Moreover, it appears that, in appealing to the notions of *buen vivir* and the rights of nature, they assume a world in which indigenous peoples, their territories and the nature within them, are somehow delinked from the capitalist system, especially in the Amazon. Maintaining those territories in an unaltered condition is thus seen to be a form of reproducing *buen vivir* (NGO member 15, 2013; NGO member 30, 2013) and, by impeding the

commodification of nature the latter's rights are thereby being respected (NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 23, 2013). As noted, though, this is a problematic narrative on the part of the two NGOs precisely because indigenous territories are already connected, to various degrees, to the capitalist system (Indigenous representative 3, 2013). So it appears that although critical ecologists recognise the essential interconnection and interdependence between humans and their surrounding world, they still appeal to “a sacredness of Nature in order to defend and secure [the local peoples’] livelihoods” (Martínez-Alier 2002: 11). These views are contained, again, in the notion of the rights of a non-human nature and the prevalent idea of territories static in time. However, a more promising explanation could emerge from the study of an actual indigenous territory from the perspectives of production of nature and territory, something that this thesis tackles in Chapter 7. But before analysing the case of the Tola Chica community, the last section of this Chapter addresses other experiences of producing territory and nature through community conservation.

### **6.3.2 Community conservation: producing the indigenous territories**

Indigenous understandings of *pachamama* as territory go well beyond the idea of a non-human nature (Indigenous representative 2, 2013; Indigenous representative 3, 2013). However, this is also a historically contentious concept that emerged after the ‘territorial turn’ of the indigenous movement. This shifting in politics involved a transformation of the political subject and the objective of the struggle: from fighting for *land* access the struggle changed to fighting for the cultural and political recognition of indigenous identity and ancestral *territories*, and their form of political organization – the indigenous community (Indigenous representative 7, 2013; see also Chapter 4). That indigenous usage has clear historical roots as noted above. For a CONAIE’s representative who is also a Tola Chica’s member, during the 1970s:

A new political subject emerged, when ECUARUNARI replaced the previous organisation of the Sierra, which was focused on the struggle for land access at the end of the hacienda system period. [In turn] ECUARUNARI committed to the struggle for the plurinational state and the indigenous identity, as many indigenous were landowners by then (Indigenous representative 3, 2013; also Scholar 2, 2013).

Hence, it is within this context that it is claimed that the notion of *pachamama* emerged, and hence why the indigenous movement has endorsed the “defence of *pachamama*” along with critical ecologists. *Pachamama* is at the centre of the political struggle, which appears to be also about the communal territory. For Humberto Cholango, CONAIE’s President in 2013, the struggle is “against the effects of capitalism in the life

of the indigenous communities, which affects the collective and communitarian way of life” (Cholango 2013)<sup>56</sup>.

It has been said that, when opposing state-led forest conservation strategies like the *Programa Socio Bosque* (PSB), critical ecologists do in fact highlight the right of indigenous peoples to *use* nature, in opposition to the official idea of ‘pristine’ natural enclosures. The latter are seen to constitute new intrusions on indigenous territories, and hence threats to indigenous peoples’ territorial rights (NGO member 1, 2012; NGO member 15, 2013; NGO member 26, 2013). So, for EA and PF, *buen vivir* and the defence of the rights of nature acquire sense in the indigenous territories precisely when local people actually use the land – particularly those in peril of being affected by the extraction of oil and minerals (NGO member 24, 2013). Indeed, for them, the indigenous territories have become forested symbols of *buen vivir* while indigenous peoples are posed as defenders of nature (NGO member 28, 2013; NGO member 24, 2013). This may well be a consequence of the country’s environmental history (see Chapter 4), but also may be because indigenous peoples have assumed such a position themselves as a political strategy in alliance with critical ecologists. Still, these appreciations are far from considering nature, or even the territories, as the product of power relationships in space.

There are a number of empirical examples across Ecuador that serve to illustrate this sort of dynamic. Thus, perhaps the most notorious one relates to the Kichwa territory of Sarayaku, located in the Southern Amazon. Sarayaku is renowned for its continued campaigning against oil extraction there, which has helped to raise international awareness and solidarity for their cause (NGO member 24, 2013). Sarayaku’s president at the time of fieldwork asserted how this group has also set out a proposal of *kawsay sacha* (the ‘living rainforest’) that neatly aligns with *buen vivir* when it is used to describe a post-extractive economy (J. Gualinga 2013)<sup>57</sup>. Indeed, the Sarayaku people define *kawsay sacha* as a space “free of oil, mining, logging, [payments for] environmental services and bio-piracy. It is a Frontier of Life, a Living Rainforest” (Sarayaku 2011). Although this may appear similar to the ideas to defend a non-human nature from the extractive industry, attributed above to some critical ecologists, the Sarayaku territory is sharply defined as a produced space by Patricia Gualinga when she speaks about the territorial ordering at stake:

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<sup>56</sup> Speech during a rally in support of the legal case against the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Non-renewable Resources and a Chinese mining company for violating the rights of nature by authorising the first large-scale mining project in Ecuador. January 15, 2013.

<sup>57</sup> Welcoming words at the Uyantza ceremony, Sarayaku territory in the Amazon. February 10, 2013.

In the Amazon world, we have the *curus* to avoid degradation. In the Amazon, each family has a space in which to rotate their *chakras*; we grow food only there, not destroying the whole territory. That's why we have so much rainforest [...] we do not cut all the trees, because there are spirits living there who need to be cared for, to maintain the equilibrium, to prevent illness (P. Gualinga 2014)<sup>58</sup>.

The Sarayaku leadership maintains a strict ordering of its territory, for instance assigning a "hunting reserve" to each family. Also, they have decided to celebrate their major festival, the *Uyantza*<sup>59</sup>, every two or three years instead of every year, to allow the wild animals populations to recover from the hunting conducted in order to feed the party guests during the four days of celebration (Personal Observation 8-11/Feb/2013). This is seen to denote careful forest management in a context clearly dependent on the autonomous production of territory (NGO member 15, 2013; NGO member 25, 2013). Indeed, an important element here is that nature – i.e. the rainforest - is precisely seen to be produced as an integral part of territorial production. This is evident in Patricia Gualinga's testimony, quoted above as well as in section 6.2.2: hunting, growing food and maintaining the forests are all part of a unified system of territorial production (a matter to which we will return in more detail in Chapter 7). Let us compare with what the PSB proposes: that those precise activities are threats to the forests (see Chapter 5). So communal territorial ordering actually challenges state territorial planning: they are two intentionalities struggling to imprint themselves on the ground (Haesbaert 2007).

Another example of community conservation efforts as part of territory production is that of the 'Defenders of the Mangrove Ecosystem' (or C-CONDEM), grassroots organization which is also an ANA's member. Its representative, who was also ANA's president at the time I conducted fieldwork, attacks state-sanctioned natural enclosures that mandate the conservation of a non-human nature:

You cannot confine nature and not touch it; the mangrove people need nature and nature needs us. We take food from the mangrove and the shells, crabs and fish need us to reforest the mangrove forest to live and we eat the shells, crabs and fish. In addition to deforestation, we open seawater channels, restoring the ecosystem and letting it regenerate, to house the biodiversity on which we depend. [In so doing] we recover the ecosystems and recover local economies. It is communitarian management with cultural identity. Identity gives a sense of belonging to a territory (NGO member 20, 2012).

This description is perhaps the clearest example of the production of nature being constitutive of the production of space (Smith 2010). Here, besides the matter of needing material access to a specific territory, it appears that a crucial element for

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<sup>58</sup> Speech at the Rights of Nature Ethics Tribunal. Quito, January 2014. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EALiOZTxDnI&index=19&list=PLOGvWBI35TMZvt\\_cN3Fws1fuRaLst2oGY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EALiOZTxDnI&index=19&list=PLOGvWBI35TMZvt_cN3Fws1fuRaLst2oGY)

<sup>59</sup> The "Sarayacu Runa, Amazanga, Allpamanda, Jatun Uyantza" is a sacred ritual which reaffirms the sovereignty of the Sarayaku people over their territory (Sarayaku 2011).

indigenous territorial production is the cumulative knowledge that allows “the mangrove people” to regulate the extraction of the mangrove products as well as to propose appropriate laws and social norms via political lobbying based on detailed *in situ* knowledge (ANA 2008: 27).

This indeed stands in sharp contradiction to production of territory that the *Programa Socio Bosque* pursues. Moreover, the “colonial state territoriality” (Indigenous representative 7, 2013), of which the PSB is part, is seen to disrupt forms of territorial production and forest conservation of indigenous peoples. Hence, it appears when seen in the light of these sorts of indigenous thinking, that *pachamama* can be seen to constitute alternatives of a kind to green capitalism – provided, though, that these concepts are linked to notions of territory and community, even as they are historically situated (NGO member 15, 2013; NGO member 23, 2013; NGO member 25, 2013). At the same time, here is a chance for critical ecologists to attempt to comprehend actually-existing indigenous communities in an effort to avoid the sorts of essentialism that some of them are prone to. In acknowledging, for example, that Andean communities are quite different from those communities based either on the Coast or in the Amazon, the homogeneous “indigenous world” begins to fall apart (Indigenous representative 7, 2013; NGO member 20, 2012).

Nonetheless, the question still remains in all of this whether these ways of thinking are even politically effective. For some Leftist non-ecologist scholars and activists, the rights of nature, *pachamama* and *buen vivir* notions remain clear impediments to the creation of a real political alternative (Scholar 6, 2013; NGO member 16, 2013), as they “fail to analyse reality as it is” by transforming the magic dimension of Andean tradition into mysticism without historical basis (Indigenous representative 3, 2013; see also Sánchez-Parga 2011). Meanwhile, for others, the struggle for *buen vivir* and the rights of nature is as valid as other struggles, as long as it is a reformist phase that will eventually lead to an eco-socialist regime (NGO member 25, 2013; NGO member 4, 2013; Scholar 2, 2013). For that, it is apparent that an approach to nature from a social nature perspective could be more politically fruitful.

But to properly assess the issues at stake in such a debate, it is vital to ground the analysis in a specific place and time – something that we turn to next in investigating practices in Tola Chica community (Chapter 7).

## 6.4 Summary

This chapter has analysed the multiple approaches to *buen vivir*, nature and territory amongst the non-state Ecuadorian environmental organizations to assess how far and in what ways the notions might form the basis of a strategy for challenging capitalism (be it green or conventional). For that, the Chapter started assessing the types of environmentalism found across environmental organizations. It appeared that, although there is a general agreement on holding the development model based on the extraction of natural resources responsible for ecological degradation, mainstream/technocratic environmentalists and critical ecologists are divided when speaking of the *alternatives* to such model. Technocratic environmentalists follow a green capitalist path in which the impacts of the development model could be technically managed by capitalism, while critical ecologists follow the trend for a social change by means of social struggle.

Focusing on critical ecologists, the Chapter then suggested that the anti-extractivist stance, as a sub-form of the critical ecologism, has limits in proposing an alternative to green capitalism as it stagnates in describing a post-extractive economy as if it were a political system in itself. On focusing on the understandings of nature and territory of this ecologism, it appears that critical ecologists end up mystifying a non-human nature with the aid of the notion of the rights of nature– which is understandable given the origins of the idea in the anti-extractivist movement. The conception of a non-human nature idea keeps the critical ecologists closer to technocratic and ecocentric environmentalists, depoliticizing the debate and jeopardizing the possibilities of political action, as the political ecology literature reviewed in Chapter 2 has suggested. Instead, the critique to green capitalism – in the form of the PSB - provides a much more politically effective approach that may help to repoliticize the quest for political alternatives. The analysis then moved from an initial focus on the views of critical ecologists to a latter focus on the perspectives of indigenous representatives. Most promising here was the interconnection of these ideas with notions about indigenous community – something seen to be crucial to both forest conservation and local well-being - a situation that will become clearer still in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 7 Tola Chica indigenous community: the social production of nature and territory**

Chapters 5 and 6 assessed state- and non-state-linked environmentalism, notably with respect to ideas about *buen vivir*, nature and territory. The overall argument was that the state has refashioned these terms, assimilating them within current international thinking on sustainable development and the scientific management of nature while the non-governmental sector has tended to use them to describe/predict a post-extractive economy. It was suggested that an overemphasis by both critical ecologists and mainstream environmentalists on the negative impacts of oil and minerals extraction has reduced the complex environmental issue to the struggle against 'extractivism'. In consequence, the alternative political system that the 'anti-extractivist' discourse may propose stays in the transition to a post-extractive economy. Hence, by maintaining such an approach, both the state and non-state environmental actors performing either a technocratic environmentalism or a critical ecologism perpetuate the idea of an external or universal nature, in a similar fashion to some indigenous representatives. Hence, the limits of the anti-extractivist stance were revealed where it assumes an essentialist approach as it undermines the possibility for a viable political response to development threats including green capitalism. In contrast, indigenous perspectives that intertwine *pachamama* with ideas about territory and community in the context of forest conservation came across as more promising in this regard.

It is fitting then in this chapter to provide a more in-depth exploration of indigenous community-based ecologism through the embedded case-study of the Tola Chica community. The aim in doing so is to gauge how far this sort of Ecuadorian environmentalism is able to successfully combine the various notions explored in this thesis so far in order to conserve forest while promoting local wellbeing; whether such local-level dynamics hold any promise as a fully-fledged alternative to a state-led technocratic environmentalism increasingly linked to green capitalism is also considered.

### **7.1 Tola Chica community**

Across Chapters 3 and 4, I briefly introduced the reader to the Tola Chica community, as well as the reasons underpinning its selection as the embedded case-study to assess indigenous community-based ecologism. In this section, I develop a fuller history of the community in order to explore how the articulation of ideas that are of central interest in this thesis are linked to political struggle as well as to divisions and differences within the community itself. In all of this, as we shall see, this community is



still able to conserve and even expand the local forest cover, thus raising intriguing issues about the wider import of such local practices.

### 7.1.1 Land conflicts, fractured territoriality and political affiliations

Tola Chica was legally constituted as a community in 1944 under the Law of Communes<sup>60</sup> (Republic of Ecuador 1937 [2004]), as a result of its splitting off from the larger community of Tola Grande<sup>61</sup> (Community member 1, 2013; Indigenous representative 4, 2013; Technical Commission Meeting, 13/May/2013). The latter was “an ancestral community that surrounded the whole Ilaló Hill” (Community member 13, 2013), whose fate was shaped, like other Andean communities, by way of class struggle as poor local residents fought to recover what they felt were *their* lands (see Chapter 4). Memories are still vivid here:

The struggles were very intense, especially with the Peñaherrera family, who put obstacles to impede the expropriation of part of their lands on the Ilaló Hill. The elders told us that there used to be armed encounters because the military forces supported this family. However, members of the community were fearless until they succeeded. In this way, through a Transactional Act, we *recovered* our lands – 400 hectares approximately (Indigenous representative 4, 2013; emphasis added).

Indeed, land conflicts have marked the history of the community in general: hence, disagreements between members of Tola Grande regarding collective labour commitments as well as local decision-making powers were behind the first clashes (Community member 1, 2013; Community member 13, 2013). The upshot of all of this tumult was that, in 1944, a number of members migrated to a nearby area and founded Tola Chica by obtaining its “legal personhood”, a form of legal State recognition of indigenous social organisations (Ministerial Agreement #442, 29/Dec/1944) – even though formal land titles would only be obtained in 1997 (Warrant of Adjudication #141, 31/Oct/1997).

As might be expected, a myriad of conflicts over the community’s new territory erupted throughout the more than 50 years that the community had existed without land titles; indeed, some of them ended up in court cases, even as they led to the departure of many members over the years (even as new individuals and families joined the community too, particularly during the last 10 years).

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<sup>60</sup> In the Andes, the term used for the type of social organisation that shares a collective territory is *comuna*, translated into English as “commune”, as opposed to *comunidad*, which would be translated to “community” and is more commonly used in the Amazon (it is also used to refer to indigenous communities in general). The Law of Communes rules both forms. However, in legal terms there is a difference between them which might lead to confusion: communities can be ruled by the Civil Code as well as the Law of Communes, and can include committees of neighbours, associations of peasants, workers or small producers. Paradoxically, it can also include indigenous communities, and so it is not uncommon for various forms of social organisations to coexist in a given community (Zapatta *et al.* 2008). Here, I will use the term “community” in English only for clarity of the text.

<sup>61</sup> Tola Chica means “Small Hill”, while Tola Grande means “Large Hill”.

When Tola Chica was founded in 1944, there were around 100 *comuneros* (members of the community) and a large expanse of land. However, by the time that the formal land titles were received in 1997, only 44 *comuneros* remained – leading to a desperate scramble to enrol relatives (e.g. husbands, wives, sons, daughters) as members in their own right (Technical Commission Meeting, 13/May/2013). This effort was necessary as the legal process for obtaining the land titles required the purchase of the land from the State<sup>62</sup>; but in order to gather together sufficient funds to buy the land, additional members were needed (Indigenous representative 4, 2013; Community member 13, 2013; Simbaña and Simbaña 2007). In the end, 64 individuals in total signed up and paid the amount required to buy their share of the land (Community member 1, 2013; Group Interview 1, 9/Apr/ 2013; Group Interview 2, 16/Apr/ 2013).

In social terms, this outcome represented a “re-foundation of the community” (Indigenous representative 4, 2013) inasmuch as many young people became *comuneros*. In turn, the influx of new blood influenced power relationships within the community, including about whether and how to conserve the forest.

Here, it is important to be clear about precisely what *comunero* means. Thus, it is simply enough a “member of the community”, and hence can be understood to mean any of the 277 people who appear in the census book<sup>63</sup>; *comunero* in fact refers to every person that has bought a share of the land title, usually a head of a family (i.e. one of the 64). In this situation, children and grandchildren of community members can become members but only through inheritance, as no new shares are permitted (according to Tola Chica’s statutes). The intention of this resolution is to prevent fragmentation of the communal territory. That being said, the leadership, acting with the full approval of the community Assembly, could potentially create some new shares to be sold in order to gain funds for the community (Community member 5, 2012; personal observation); in this regard, this option means that, interestingly enough, the territory constitutes a form of collective savings. For instance, if the community requires funds (e.g. to cover the expenses of one of the numerous lawsuits for land tenure that they have faced over the years, to improve the communal infrastructure, to organise a party or a ritual, etc.), they could generate a new land share and sell it (Community member 1, 2013; Community member 11, 2013).

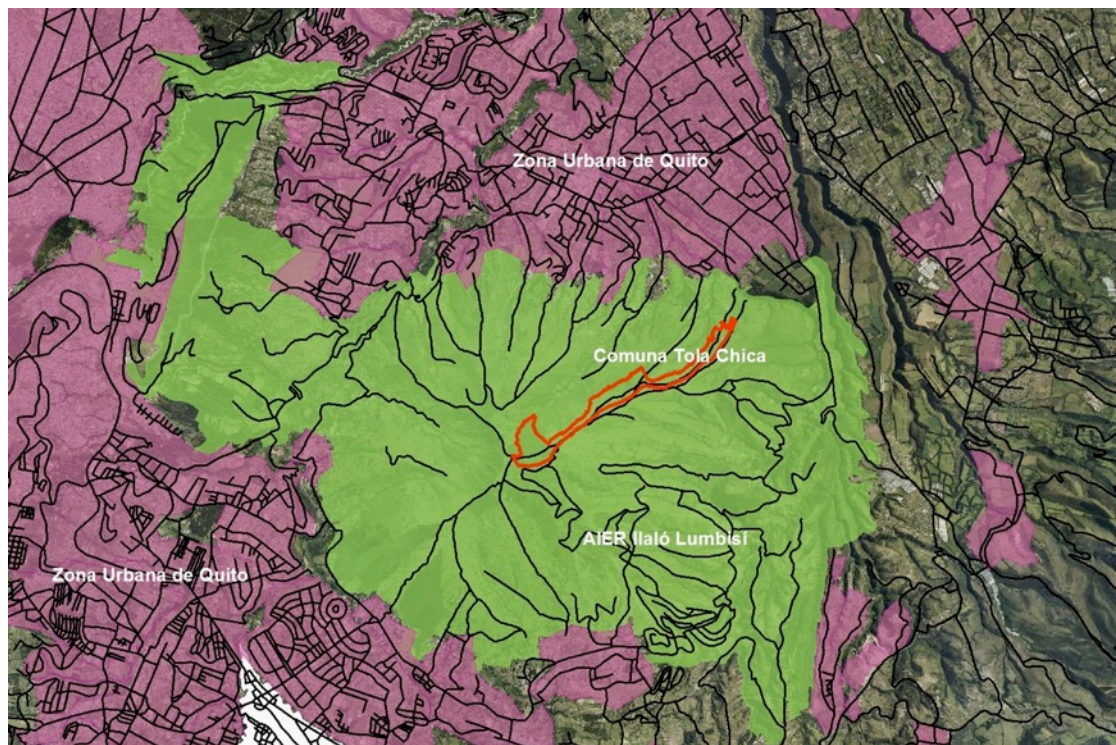
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<sup>62</sup> This was stated in the Law of Agrarian Development, issued in 1994 (Republic of Ecuador 1994).

<sup>63</sup> This is a registry of the community’s members and their families. It is updated every two years and is registered every year with the Ministry of Agriculture as one of the prerequisites for maintaining the legal personhood (Community member 10, 2013; Republic of Ecuador 1937 [2004], Art. 9).

Meanwhile, members of the community have access to 5,850 square metres of land, distributed across three separate lots (section 7.3.1 explains how this is arranged spatially in the territory). They are obliged to participate in the Assemblies once a month and in the *mingas* (collective work) once every three months; in return, they are entitled to vote on community matters and to elect and be elected for any position in the leadership<sup>64</sup>. As such, *comuneros* are of the highest importance in the local social order and, in fact, are those members of the community who lead on conservation matters as well as maintaining links to the national indigenous movement (i.e. CONAIE-ECUARUNARI). In short, *comuneros* are responsible for introducing to the community the notions in which this PhD is most interested.

Today, the territory of Tola Chica appears rather fractured. It is occupied by food crops of many kinds, but not by houses (Community member 1, 2013). Instead, members choose to live in the lowlands some four kilometres away in private properties near to the town of Tumbaco; thus, the communal territory is reserved exclusively for the purpose of culture, forest conservation (Simbaña and Simbaña 2007) and, as the fieldwork found, for future housing. Figure 7.1 shows the location of the communal territory in relation to the suburban boroughs where Tola Chica's population lives. Photo 7.1 shows a view of Quito and Tumbaco from Tola Chica's territory.



<sup>64</sup> The possibility of granting remaining members of the family the right to participate in the Assemblies with a voice but no vote was eventually agreed to (Community Assembly, 18/Sep/2013).

Figure 7.1 Tola Chica's territory (red) in the Ilaló Hill (green) and the suburban boroughs where its population lives (pink). Prepared with the assistance of the Collective of Critical Geography of Ecuador, 2016.



Photo 7.1 Quito (background) and Tumbaco (foreground), as seen from Tola Chica.  
Source: Author.

Interestingly, some Tola Chica members argue that their suburban homes occupy land that used to be part of Tola Grande (Community member 1, 2013; Indigenous representative 4, 2013). So, for them, the boroughs are in fact a continuum of traditional communal territory (Community member 9, 2012). This sentiment reflects a wider set of feelings about territory both as a social organisation and as a communal property in the region (see below).

The history of the community is narrated by the interviewees as a series of land conflicts: individual and group interviews invariably commenced with a recounting of the main ones and this is also true for the written material gathered during fieldwork. It is important in this regard to note that the forest whose conservation is the focus of discussion in this chapter (and embodying, as it were, the main notions of interest to this PhD), was notably obtained as a result of a land conflict. Thus, the “native forest” (as the members of the community refer to the patch of Andean forest that forms part of their territory) was gained in a lawsuit against the Peñaherrera, a family of powerful *hacendados* (big land owners), over a piece of land that had long remained forested. The date on which this lawsuit occurred is not clear, but one informant told me that the

conflict was at its height during the period 1970-1975 (Community member 3, 2013), while another traced it back still further:

The issue of the forest was still pending after obtaining the legal personhood. The Peñaherrera [family] had lands between La Viña and La Cervecería. They wanted to give the lands on the Ilaló Hill to their *huasipungueros*<sup>65</sup> – what today is the native forest - but they couldn't. The conflict lasted 20 years and finally the [Tola Chica] community assumed control of the forest [...] [it was] in 1967 when we won the lawsuit (Indigenous representative 4, 2013).

Apart from these two interviewees, community members (aside from the leadership) curiously did not appear to have any knowledge of the process by which they had gained possession of the forest. In contrast, almost all interviewees proactively described to me the procurement of legal personhood in 1944 and the acquisition of the land titles in 1997 (for example, Community member 1, 2013; Community member 12, 2013). Those landmark events are also narrated in the documents produced by community members as well as in secondary sources written about the community (see for example Burbano and Lasso 2006, Simbaña and Simbaña 2007). In fact, obtaining the land titles was seen by the *comuneros* as a major success in the pursuit of territorial autonomy, despite having to accept all the state regulations that came with such recognition, such as, carrying out regular elections and population censuses, accepting authority within a small group of *comuneros*, and, importantly for the aims of this PhD, conducting territorial planning for the purpose of forest conservation (see section 7.2). However in the beginning, it was undeniable external pressure that caused the formalization of collective ownership and the requirement to observe the logics and practices enforced by the state (Erazo 2013, see also Chapter 2).

Other things were also seemingly prominent in the collective memory. Thus, for example, the affiliation of the community to the national indigenous political movement was often referred to as a crucial milestone in local history, especially concerning the acquisition of land titles (Community member 1, 2013; Indigenous representative 4, 2013). One elder interviewee recalled:

We were in such a bad situation because [the governmental agency that was processing the land titles] were going to erase us [i.e. dispossess us]. Then we contacted this organisation, CONAIE, because the others were about to kick us out. And there was a companion that was *licenciado*<sup>66</sup> who told us: Let's go to ECUARUNARI, to CONAIE; they will help us. And they did (Group Interview 1, 9/Apr/2013).

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<sup>65</sup> The *huasipungo* was a system of indigenous exploitation that Ecuador inherited from Spanish colonial times, which was abolished in 1964. Indigenous people were forced to work up to six days per week in the large farms for no salary. As payment, they were given a small parcel of land to sustain their families, the *huasipungo* (Simbaña 2005).

<sup>66</sup> Graduated from university.



In this manner, the quest to retain access to their land was apparently the main driver leading the community to reach out to CONAIE. In turn, this move deeply influenced Tola Chica's future – not only at a political level, but also in terms of introducing the community to ecological projects (and to the adoption of the notions being studied in this thesis).

Tola Chica joined the National Confederation of Kichwa Peoples of Ecuador (ECUARUNARI) and, through it, the National Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities (CONAIE) in 1995 (Community member 1, 2013; Indigenous representative 4, 2013). The result was that these organizations (and an allied political party, *Pachakutik* founded in 1995) were instrumental in Tola Chica's land titling process. Indeed, this political connection had multiple implications – including the development of links to someone inside the National Institute of Agrarian Development (Instituto Nacional de Desarrollo Agrario or INDA), the government agency in charge of land titling:

With CONAIE we supported *Pachakutik*, and put some men in congress<sup>67</sup>; we even succeeded in appointing a *Pachakutik* activist in INDA. We were strong. We then hired our current lawyer, who is a member of CONAIE, because [before him] we had lots of lawyers: some betrayed us, others helped us, others stole from us, but this one was good. That's how we obtained the collective land titles in 1997 (Community member 1, 2013).

In this regard, assessing the strong bonds between Tola Chica's leadership and the indigenous organisations is important in terms of understanding the effects of this engagement on the conservation of the forest, the community's declared environmentalism, and the administration of the territory. This is of significance, in turn, to our framing of how *buen vivir*, nature and territory are experienced in Tola Chica.

It was clear from interviews that Tola Chica's leadership fully understood the importance of being part of the indigenous movement in order to maintain a grip on their territory. Chapter 4 reviewed CONAIE's rise which brought to the fore the indigenous people as political actors (see also Dávalos 2002, Simbaña 2009). Still, it was certainly not plain sailing after that. Thus, in 1994 a new Agrarian Law was passed that, according to Tola Chica's leaders, threatened collective lands owned by indigenous communities. Within this context:

CONAIE called for an uprising to stop the law and to start a broader discussion for a new law, based on consensus. The objective of that process of struggle was the defence of the communal lands, an objective and struggle the community identified with; so we went to ask for support and advice, and have belonged since then to CONAIE (Indigenous representative 3, 2013).

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<sup>67</sup> In the 1996 national elections, *Pachakutik* won seven seats in the National Congress and came third in the presidential elections, becoming the fourth largest political force in the country (Dávalos 2005).

However, Tola Chica is not a passive member of CONAIE. Two of its leaders (themselves sons of one of the oldest members and a former community leader) are important members of the indigenous movement: one was the Academic Director of the indigenous university, Pluriversity *Amawtay Wasí*<sup>68</sup> (Indigenous representative 4, 2013), while his brother<sup>69</sup> was the Political Coordinator of CONAIE at the time I conducted fieldwork for this PhD (Indigenous representative 3, 2012). Indeed, the affiliation of Tola Chica community with CONAIE was itself a crucial part in the wider political empowerment process insofar as it involved “strengthening the Assembly and [hence indigenous] identity recovery” (Indigenous representative 3, 2013), while also being a matter of local pride. For example, Photo 7.2 depicts the 2012 parade during the Festival of the Sun (*Inty Raymi*). The parade starts in Tumbaco and goes to the community’s territory up in the Ilaló Hill; in the photo the leaders are seen marching in the front holding the sign that declares: “Tola Chica community, Ministerial Agreement 442, 29 Dec. 1944. Affiliated to CONAIE-ECUARUNARI”.



Photo 7.2 Parade during the Festival of the Sun (*Inty Raymi*) in 2012.  
Source: Tola Chica Archives.

It certainly helped that the community’s objectives were closely aligned with those of CONAIE; and, from the community's viewpoint, the whole point of Tola Chica's initial

<sup>68</sup> The University was closed last 3 November 2013 as part of the modernisation process of the Ecuadorian higher education system (Resolution No. 001-068-CEAACES-2013, 31/OCT/2013).

<sup>69</sup> During the year following my fieldwork (2014), this member was elected president of Tola Chica.

engagement with the indigenous organisations was to initiate “a process to understand the [nature of] political organisation. Internally, we sought to organise through the assemblies and *mingas* while the link to CONAIE gave us the national perspective” (Indigenous representative 4, 2013).

In short, the political bond of the community to ECUARUNARI and CONAIE was sealed at this time, along with the local adoption of the indigenous movement’s political discourse and praxis, including notions of interest here. Indeed, one community member claims that she has “heard the term *buen vivir* only from people from CONAIE” (Community member 9, 2012). The community Secretary concurred: “I heard those terms for the first time when I became a member of the community. They are used by the leaders associated with ECUARUNARI. Also I heard about *Pachamama* in the indigenous university” (Community member 10, 2013).

Later in this chapter, I explore community political utilisation of these terms and how they are understood. Next, though, it is important to be clear about how the community became interested in ecological projects, including the decision to conserve the forest, in the first place.

## 7.2 Tola Chica’s ecologism

Tola Chica began to engage with ecological projects soon after obtaining the land titles in 1997. Indeed, those titles were granted on the condition that the community conducted forest conservation and reforestation (Warrant of Adjudication #141, 31/Oct/1997). In 2001, the community thus became involved in its first ecological project funded by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) through ECUARUNARI (and with the additional support of another environmental organisation) – a project that permitted them to build their first plant nursery as well as to reproduce in it 60,000 trees of diverse native species for reforestation (Tola Chica Community 1998). This was followed in 2002 by the community conducting *mingas* centred on the mass planting of native trees, some 15,000 of them in all (Community member 1, 2013; Community member 3, 2013; see also Simbaña and Simbaña 2007).

This project launched Tola Chica’s environmental involvement. The local leaders of this endeavour, dubbed by the rest of the community ‘the ecologists’, played a crucial role here on in (Community member 5, 2012; Indigenous representative 4, 2013; Community member 10, 2013; Community member 13, 2013). Indeed, these individuals are pivotal in general: they are part of Tola Chica’s overall leadership, while



being close to the national and regional indigenous organisations – e.g. CONAIE and ECUARUNARI (Indigenous representative 3, 2013; Indigenous representative 4, 2013).

It is important to note here that the community as a whole does not display what might be called an ecological consciousness. Instead, such thinking emerges out of specific alliances and confrontations regarding the use of the territory and its associated ecological practices. Much of the action is hence found in the Assemblies; it is also visible in specific workshops and events, as with one that I was able to attend in September 2013, in which the community discussed and re-defined the territorial ordering (Community Assembly, 18/Sep/2013; Extra-ordinary Assembly, 25/Sep/2013). Tola Chica's ecological awareness and practices are, thus, strongly politicised. And three groups can be observed in this light: (1) the ecologists: those who conduct the environmental practices, while self-identifying (and in turn being identified by others), as 'the ecologists', together with their family members; (2) the supporters: those who are close to the indigenous movement but, rather than getting involved directly in environmental practices, tend to passively support them; and (3) the residents: those who do not get involved at all.

The environmental practices engaged in by the first group have mainly consisted of reforestation, agro-ecological practices and sustainable architecture. With UNDP funding, they began to experiment with food seeds, while also collecting the seeds of trees from the 'native forest' for the purpose of reforestation. There was much enthusiasm about and dedication to this work: "The community members participated enthusiastically in the *mingas* for reforestation. After the project finished, we managed to maintain the plant nursery by ourselves, selling the plants and seedlings. We didn't need any NGO support for that" (Community member 9, 2012). Later, they became closely aligned to an organisation dedicated to the promotion of agro-ecological practices and sustainable architecture, the Network of Seed Guardians (Red de Guardianes de Semillas or RGS). In fact, three *comuneros* and their families became active in RGS too – indeed, in 2003, they received funding from the Ecuadorian Committee of Agro-ecology<sup>70</sup> (Coordinadora Ecuatoriana de Agroecología or CEA) through the RGS to continue their reforestation work, to organise the first national 'Encounter of Seeds Guardians'<sup>71</sup> and other related events (Photo 7.3) and, ultimately,

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<sup>70</sup> The CEA is one of the members of the National Environmental Assembly (Asamblea Nacional Ambiental or ANA, see Chapter 6), dedicated to promoting sustainable and agro-ecological practices and public policies in rural Ecuador (ANA 2008).

<sup>71</sup> The Encounters of Seed Guardians gather peasants from around the country who keep seeds that are otherwise threatened with extinction due to the homogenization of seeds underpinning the current agricultural model of development. During the Encounters, the peasants exchange seeds as well as cultivation methods and agro-ecological knowledge (Community member 5, 2012; Mateu and Rubió 2013).

to re-build the plant nursery (Photo 7.4) which had been destroyed as a result of the historical antagonism of a few former *comuneros* (Community member 1, 2013; Community member 5, 2012; Community member 9, 2012).



Photo 7.3 Community women obtaining seeds from different types of maizes.  
Source: Tola Chica's Archives.



Photo 7.4 The plant nursery. In the background is where the community's Assemblies are held once a month.  
Source: Author.

Other projects were launched that contributed to the wider building of Tola Chica's reputation for undertaking ecological activities. In 2007, for example, the community procured funds jointly provided by the municipality of San Cugat in Catalonia (Spain) and the Pichincha provincial government (the province to which Tola Chica belongs) to build eco-infrastructures on the community's territory. These were the first structures to be erected there and "were designed according to the [local] environment and built with *mingas* and the individual work of the community's members" (Community member 3, 2013). Indeed, while conducting my fieldwork, I witnessed two *comuneros* build their own eco-houses in the area, even as further funding was obtained to plant an 'edible forest' – all of which in different ways demonstrated the possibilities that existed in terms of combining reforestation and food production goals (Community member 4, 2013).

As the years have gone by, the community ecologists have remained part of the local political leadership (Community member 2, 2013; Community member 15, 2013). For example, there is the current member in charge of the nursery (i.e. the 'nurseryman') who has also been the Tola Chica Treasurer for at least the last ten years (Community member 1, 2013). His work and that of the former nurseryman has been essential for driving ecological projects supported by both critical ecologist and mainstream environmental organizations. For example, the Ecuadorian Committee of Agroecology (from which they obtained funds for the seeds projects) is a member of ANA, which as we saw before is one of the two main national environmental organisations (Chapter 6). In addition, the Network of Seeds Guardians (RGS) members have worked intermittently with environmental NGOs, which are either members of ANA or of CEDENMA (Community member 5, 2013; Community member 11, 2013; see also Chapter 6 for an account of NGOs).

This multi-faceted engagement with environmental organizations has introduced mainstream as well as critical environmental ideas and concepts into Tola Chica's environmental dynamics. In parallel with this, the 'supporters' – i.e. members of the local leadership who retain strong bonds with the national indigenous movement - see in ecological discourse a powerful tool for political praxis in the modern era. For the supporters, being the owners of "the last forest remnant of native forest on Ilaló Hill" (Simbaña and Simbaña 2007: 32), as well as being national pioneers in reforestation

using native plant species, brings prestige and political capital to the community (Community member 5, 2012). Certainly, one such member celebrates what he calls the convergence of the ecologists' and community's interests:

On the one hand, for the members of the community reforesting and conserving the forest means [that they] maintain and respect [and hence validate] the community's decision-making processes. On the other hand, for the ecologists [the conservation of the forest] is something vital. Ecologists and community [thus] come together because we all respect the forest. The ecologists do that because of the data and information: they want to conserve the biodiversity. For the community it is the sense of belonging or reference: because I am linked to it, I conserve it (Indigenous representative 4, 2013).

Here, a supporter identifies how the ecologists' techno-centric and eco-efficient point of view is indicative of technocratic environmentalism, while the ecologists also sometimes advance an ecocentric understanding of nature or subscribe to the anti-market stance of NGO critical ecologists. But ultimately, it is the place-based activities that mainly shape Tola Chica's ecologism, where ecologists and supporters understand environmental issues as being profoundly social and political, both in terms of producing an idea of what nature is and of actually producing nature (Castree 2013, see below).

For example, critical to these environmental practices (especially, forest conservation) has been the development of the Territorial Management Plan (which will be fully explained below). It is the community's Technical Commission that is responsible for developing the Plan – an entity created in 2004 to, among other things, write funding proposals to practically be in a position to execute the Plan (Simbaña and Simbaña 2007); the Commission is mainly staffed by the ecologists. Not surprisingly, then, the Plan emphasises forest conservation as part of a wider territorial use strategy that simultaneously upholds agroecological production and ecological urbanisation; and, it stresses the importance of collective organisation in order to do so (Community member 3, 2013; Community member 5, 2013).

In short, the overall narrative to emerge from the piecemeal genesis of these ecological projects is the inter-connection of the conservation of the forest, ecological agricultural production, and managing the territory collectively; and, in reverse, the community's autonomous control of its territory is intimately bound up with a wider ecological rationale. And, because of the well-networked nature of the community members involved in these projects, it is perhaps not surprising that they align their ecological consciousness with the notions of *buen vivir*, nature and territory. As such, the next two sections tackle this aspect, particularly regarding how the community has responded to approaches by *Programa Socio Bosque* (PSB) (which was seen to be clearly linked to

an emerging state-linked green capitalism in Chapter 5) and to the forest conservation strategies of the Municipality of Quito in the on-going conflict over the conservation of Ilaló Hill, of which Tola Chica's territory is a part.

## 7.3 Producing nature

### 7.3.1 *Pachamama*: universal, external or socationature?

The *Programa Socio Bosque* (PSB) approached Tola Chica in 2011 to see whether it wanted to become a partner in the scheme. But this overture occurred at a time when one of the ecologists was holding the community presidency; "bad luck for them!" this individual told me during the interview (Community member 3, 2013). In effect, the community had categorically rejected the programme because they had heard about negative impacts of the PSB in various Amazon territories from their national network counterparts (Community member 1, 2013; Community member 3, 2013). For the Tola Chica leaders who were approached, the main sticking-point was the loss of territorial autonomy under the PSB; as a secondary matter, a concern was also raised about the commodification of nature. One participant summarized the situation:

"the only advantage was to receive a subsidy but how could we sell our mother? As much as they [the PSB officers] [might] respect our territorial rights the fact of receiving money... it is not worth it" (Indigenous representative 4, 2013).

Here, then, is a discourse clearly linked more than anything else to that promoted by the likes of CONAIE and ECUARUNARI, which are, in turn, influenced by EA (see Chapter 6).

In this response, there was also a shrewd assessment of the financial inadequacy of the PSB offer. Indeed, and as a community that was used to receiving and managing funds for forest conservation, Tola Chica members could immediately spot a poor deal when they saw it: "[the PSB officers] approached us and offered US \$450 per year. This was an insult!" opined the current nurseryman (Community member 1, 2013). The key community member involved at the time (who had been in charge of the plant nursery in the past which was the main centre of the community's environmental management) elaborated:

For us, it would have been US\$400 per year. In larger areas, it could be profitable but for us, with a small territory like ours, it would not be profitable. That's why [the PSB] did not pressure us and we decided not to accept. The Assembly decided. It's too little money for preventing people from taking cows into the forest; we would have to hire a forest ranger! For \$400 a year? It's not worth it (Community member 3, 2013).

In short, it was too little money for too much sacrifice. In the case reported by Erazo (2013) in the Amazon, even as this community receives \$39,500 per year, most of the

money is spent in patrolling the 11,000 hectare PSB Conservation Area. As per the Tola Chica case, the community's forest was in fact very small when compared with those in the Amazon (see Chapter 5); hence PSB officers, for their part, did not insist on a deal either.

Nonetheless, this episode raises wider issues of concern to this thesis and which came across clearly to me in interviewing community members. Thus, this outcome highlighted how the community (or, more specifically, its leaders) approaches and uses ecological discourse, including notions about nature as well as the human-nature relationship. Take, for example, how concerns were raised by community representatives as to PSB-imposed limits on accessing the forest, and how in turn this would reframe the people's relationship with the forest: "The [PSB] contract said that we would lose authority over the forest, that we would have to call them, asking them if we could use [the forest]. That is painful: asking for authorisation to get into the forest" (Community member 3, 2013). A key concern here, then, was the loss of territorial control. Yet another major concern related to the fact that the PSB would thereby drive a wedge between community members and the forest, even though all of these elements together form part of a whole, described and experienced variously as territory, community, land, crops, animals and nature (see more on this below).

Such thinking forms part of the indigenous cosmovision that inspired the enactors of the notions of *buen vivir* and the rights of nature in the first place in the country (see Chapters 1 and 2). These ideas have also informed a politics that goes beyond any equation of *pachamama* and a non-human nature (with which humans then need to relate harmoniously), or universal nature (that embraces everything, including humans) which, as Chapter 6 argued, has ultimately failed as a possible attempt to challenge green capitalism. As such, it is important to next gauge how Tola Chica's members approach the terms *pachamama* and nature in a possibly distinctive manner.

Predictably, in individual semi-structured interviews, the typical response of the leadership was to present the forest conservation and reforestation activities as part of a natural consciousness and as part of community life, a form of ecocentric vision of nature:

Since the beginnings of the community we have learned how to take care of the forest. I'm not going to say that we never use it [the forest]. Maybe somebody once cut a tree because they needed it; this happens, but we have always taken care of the forest (Community member 1, 2013).

For another leader all of the members of the community are seen to care for the forest and for nature in general because they "still cultivate using [low impact] ancestral

methods [while] they greatly respect the forest and the Ilaló Hill” (Community member 4, 2013). Such thinking on the part of this ecologist highlights the relationship and mutual dependence between conserving the forest and agricultural production, a glimpse into a possible *socionatures*.

Additionally, this thinking is also marked by a highly pragmatic streak inasmuch as the forest and the area reserved for reforestation are spaces for ‘projects’ for which the community can and has already received funds from outsiders, even as these spaces might underpin a future source of income through an activity such as ecotourism (Community Council Meeting, 31/Mar/2013; Community Assembly, 18/Sep/2013). At the same time, these are also key areas in terms of organising territorial use and communal life: reforestation requires the organisation of *mingas*; the Assemblies meanwhile are held in the plant nursery – and mostly revolve around discussing projects relating to the forest. As such, the forest is crucial for the production of territory *and* a sense of community identity (see section 7.4).

But beyond the ecologists leading the Tola Chica response on environmental matters who are clearly versed in the language and ideas of concern to this PhD, how do other members of the community understand and articulate relationships to nature? In my research, these community members frequently associated the forest with reforestation and conservation activities (Group Interview 1, 9/Apr/ 2013); they also linked it with trees, plants and animals, as well as with *mingas* (that is, communal work) (Group Interview 2, 16/Apr/2013; Extra-ordinary Assembly, 25/Sep/2013). For some, though, the forest was seen as a space that was off limits to them – something that not everyone was entirely happy with:

That area is segregated: we cannot touch it because it’s a reserve. It was decided that it would not be touched because it is the forest itself. There are water-springs there. [The leadership of that time] left the forest undivided. It belongs to the community but has a separated land title. It was after we won a lawsuit; we won the lawsuit and in an Assembly it was decided [to leave the forest untouched] (Group Interview 2, 16/Apr/2013).

Here, some see the forest as being associated with prohibitions: no animal grazing, fires or agriculture. And while the forest was widely seen to be a collectively-owned and indivisible entity, the banishment of all exploitation in it was not something that everyone liked – for instance, as some of the exchanges at one Assembly held in September 2013 that I attended attested (Extra-ordinary Assembly, 25/Sep/2013). Through my various observations, it also became apparent that some community members experience the forest primarily as non-human nature in the form of a natural reserve within their territory.

Moreover, *pachamama* did not prove to be a familiar term to many community members. Few interviewees knew the word – which appears to be a side effect of having lost Kichwa as their first language (Community member 9, 2012; Community member 3, 2013). Indeed, only some of the oldest members of the community still speak Kichwa, and even then only between themselves “when they don’t want to be understood” by younger members or by strangers (Community member 10, 2013). This estrangement from the Kichwa language is not to be gainsaid inasmuch as it was part of the reasoning behind the selection of this site in the first place (as discussed in Chapter 3).

Set against this general lack of knowledge about the notion, the leadership that is affiliated to the national indigenous movement – the supporters - uses *pachamama* regularly and in association with ‘nature’, albeit within the wider context of a professed Andean-Amazon cosmovision:

Yes, *pachamama* is ‘Mother Nature’ or ‘Mother Earth’ but be careful – Kichwa is a polysemic language: *pacha* is masculine, the absolute; *mama* is feminine, that which makes life possible; everything from nature. In turn, *Pachacamac* is the vital force, the vital idea, and the god. Inside *Pachamama* you can make contact with *Pachacamac*. This is a dual but complementary idea (Indigenous representative 4, 2013).

Indeed, it is common when explaining one of the biggest festivals of the year – *Inti Raymi* or the Fest of the Sun - that a community leader will say: “[the festival] is the celebration of the harvest and fruits obtained from Mother Earth, *pachamama*; thanks to the energy of the sun” (Indigenous representative 3, 2013).

In contrast, when the ecologists speak about *pachamama*, they readily deploy an ecocentric discourse that insists on a separation between humans and nature (as already discussed in Chapters 5 and 6). The nurseryman thus observes:

The indigenous [people] didn’t believe in the [Christian] god, but in the water, the snake... when a flood came they said: ‘*pachamama* is punishing us’. Mother nature is a living being; for each tree we cut, she suffers. And when she gets really angry she doesn’t care if we are her defenders; she punishes us all. She doesn’t forgive us because we’re killing her offspring: the trees. Not because we cut one [tree] for necessity, but because in the large forests they are cutting trees for oil, dams. We are hurting her for money (Community member 1, 2013).

In general, I found in various conversations with him during my time in Tola Chica that a human-nature dichotomy tended to be present in the words of the nurseryman, especially when he spoke about nature conservation and its technical aspects. At the same time, however, the sort of testimony noted above also touches upon the perceived community intention and need to *use* nature, but not for the sake of capitalist accumulation. And he is not alone in using social and ecological discourse in a complex manner. Thus, for another ecologist, although ‘nature’ is still seen essentially



to reside outside of humanity, it is also nonetheless and simultaneously a matter of speaking about associated human activity: “I was told that we have to take care of *pachamama* because it is the *cultivable* soil, and we must try to not pollute it” (Community member 9, 2012; emphasis added).

Here it is *pachamama* who is seen to feed, nurture and shelter people via “the cultivable soil”. More broadly, many community members seem to designate as ‘nature’ and ‘Mother Nature’ the totality of the world that “gives us life, health, everything” (Group Interview 1, 9/Apr/ 2013), hence, it is universal nature. It is clear in this regard that this is an understanding far removed from ideas of fractured nature and segregated spaces: “It is everything, where we live” (Group Interview 2, 16/Apr/2013); “It is everything: our lands, our plants, animals, people” (Group Interview 3, 20/Apr/2013). Indeed, the idea of nature as a kind of matrix wherein all life exists emerged too in the context of some of my individual interviews. Thus, for example, the nurseryman’s father – one of the oldest community members - pointed out: “Without Mother Nature all of this would not exist; our food. How are we going to live if we have nowhere to sit?” (Community member 13, 2013).

In a sense, ‘mother’ refers to one who feeds us all – but not necessarily a ‘wisdom’ mother that has to be protected, pure and untouched, away from humanity. On the contrary, this link to the act of *feeding* would seem to locate this particular indigenous conception of nature closer to the idea of produced nature, insofar as, to obtain goods from nature, human labour must be undertaken on it: *pachamama* “gives us food; that’s why she’s the mother” (Indigenous representative 4, 2013). So, although for some community members the forest might be experienced as a segregated space that is unavailable for production – i.e. external nature -, nature yet tends to be experienced in the community as a totality – i.e. universal nature - that needs human labour to produce what the community needs to live on – i.e. social nature. The produced nature encompasses both material goods (“Nature is the product of our territory”, Group Interview 2, 16/Apr/2013) and symbolic aspects (“Nature is where I was born and where I am going”, Indigenous representative 4, 2013). How far nature is perceived here to be actively produced, and hence might be seen to inform a novel form of resistance to green capitalism, is assessed further next.

### **7.3.2 Socio-natures and the agricultural link**

The question of produced nature in Tola Chica notably revolves around the elaboration of agricultural practices. There are few residents still working on agricultural production. The census carried out in 2012 showed that only 15 people considered agriculture to

be their main economic activity (with three self-identifying as agro-ecologists and ten as agricultural labourers), that is 7% of the total population. The rest of the population identified themselves as professionals/employees (52.4%), housekeepers (25.1%), self-employed (5%) or students (7.5%) (Tola Chica's Census Book 2012). However, Tola Chica is nonetheless an agricultural community; all of the families hence dedicate some of their time to agricultural activities, while half of the women, who identify exclusively as housekeepers, are also in charge of farming (Community member 1, 2013; Indigenous representative 3, 2013; Indigenous representative 4, 2013). Indeed, 77% of community families maintained crops in 2007 (Simbaña and Simbaña 2007). So, in the Tola Chica community, nature and *pachamama* are to be understood within a context of agriculture and food production. The nurseryman expresses this situation with these words: "In my veins, I feel an urgency to live from what nature provides. If I have crops and medicinal plants on all my property, that is good" (Community member 1, 2013). Indeed, as another interviewee added, "to recover the native forest [involves] recovering the biodiversity and also the diversity of agricultural products" (Indigenous representative 3, 2013). This attachment to agriculture is also reflected in a detailed agricultural knowledge:

Up in the Ilaló Hill we have maize, beans, *mellocos*<sup>72</sup>, *ocas*, peas, wheat, barley, *chochos*, nasturtiums, and potatoes, white carrots, *morochos* and white peanuts. Sometimes the plants don't produce, God punishes us: last year it rained a lot. This year it's good: it rains and then it stops. In zone 3<sup>73</sup>, we can produce everything. In zone 2, we have eucalyptus, *guabas*, pines, laurel, small guavas... only trees. In zone 1, we have alfalfa, eucalyptus, lemon verbena, rosemary, avocado, laurel, aloe and corn. The native forest is on the [Ilaló] Hill, next to the *Huila*. The reforestation zone is below. For reforestation we use bay, *guaba*, loquat, *pumamaqui*, *cholan* and myrtle, which is the *Huila* (Group Interview 3, 20/Apr/2013).

In this group interview there is no distinction made in practice between conserving the forest, maintaining the area for reforestation and the agricultural cultivation zones. Hence, clearly through agriculture, but also via reforestation and active forest conservation labour, the community members produce nature. For example, the 1998 Community Management Plan lists forest conservation among its "agronomic and cultural practices"; the Plan goes on to recommend conserving the forest, in combination with pastures and crops, to recover soil health and productivity (Tola Chica Community 1998: 3, 5, 10; see also below).

But perhaps the clearest example of nature being produced through agriculture is the project of the "edible forest", an agroforestry initiative designed to recover water

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<sup>72</sup> The words in italics are species of plants native to the Andes for which there is no English translation.

<sup>73</sup> The zones refer to the territorial zoning, to be explained in section 7.4.1.

springs, replenish soils, and provide food at the same time (Technical Commission 2007; Extra-ordinary Assembly, 25/Sep/2013). The edible forest was planted next to the communitarian house (Photo 7.5) and included fruit trees and useful shrubs and plants that recreate the dynamics of a forest while providing food at the same time (Community member 4, 2013).



Photo 7.5 Partial view of the area where the edible forest was planted in early 2014. The sign states: "Project Edible Forest - Tola Chica Community".

Source: Tola Chica's Archives.

Moreover, nature is produced symbolically through rituals and festivals throughout the year. Every October 5<sup>th</sup>, for example, the festival of San Francisco or *Kolla Raymi* occurs, during which all community members walk in pilgrimage to the top of Ilaló Hill to reach an ancestral tree, the *Huila del Señor*, in order to pray for rain (Burbano and Lasso 2006). This pilgrimage is undertaken because the community members perceive that, sometimes, nature needs help: "Normally, nature has its cycles, passing from one season to another – winter, summer - but sometimes nature can be delayed, and so we do the pilgrimage" (Community member 1, 2013).

As we will see, all of these activities – maintaining the forest, conducting reforestation, building eco-housing, planting the edible forest and carrying out agroforestry - are framed by specific zoning prescriptions set out in the Territorial Management Plans. In turn, such territorial zoning, as well as symbolic appropriations of territory (e.g. via

rituals), is part-and-parcel of the local production of nature. Next, we assess this territorial production process in more depth.

## **7.4 Tola Chica's territory production**

The production of nature and territory in Tola Chica must be understood as a community-based phenomenon in that they are both produced collectively. The forest is protected but only as a result of collective action and decision-making (albeit, not without intra-community strife). The section explores these dynamics even as it considers how far they have helped Tola Chica to pose a workable alternative for forest conservation in Ecuador that effectively contests green capitalism initiatives such as the *Programa Socio Bosque*.

### **7.4.1 Tola Chica territorial planning**

Territorial planning was bound up in the very creation of the community. As has already been mentioned, a Plan for Land Use was a prerequisite for it to obtain land titles in 1997 (Community member 1, 2013; Indigenous representative 4, 2013; also Community Assembly, 18/Sep/2013) as well as being a requirement for the subsequent maintenance of rights of possession over the territory (Warrant of Adjudication #141, 31/Oct/1997, section 1). Certainly, the land titles were issued with clear recommendations for productive activities, including mandatory forest conservation and reforestation, which attests to the influence of the state in early community formation (Erazo 2013), even as it demonstrates the state tendency to enforce land tenure to local communities rather than granting "community tenure" and hence wider community autonomy (Asiyanbi 2016: 150).

While the task of developing a Plan for Land Use must have seemed to be a daunting one to the newly registered community back in the 1990s, they were given considerable support and advice by the Sierra's regional indigenous organisation, ECUARUNARI. Thus, this first Plan was created with the technical assistance of ECUARUNARI, even as this organisation assisted the community in obtaining the land titles, therefore ECUARUNARI acted as facilitator and link between the state and the community. In subsequent years, the Plan has been updated three times: in 1998 as part of a larger bid to obtain UNDP funding; in 2007 in order to secure the San Cugat funding; and in 2013 as part of the community's efforts to confront the municipality of Quito (Indigenous representative 4, 2013; also Technical Commission Meeting, 13/May/2013; see below). Figure 7.2 is a map of the community's territory as it appears in the Warrant of Adjudication. The colours denoting the zones were added afterwards,



document established areas for cultivation (23.24 hectares), agro-forestry and pastures (32.46 hectares), forestry or reforestation (25 hectares), fruit trees and communal houses (10 hectares), and native forest (12.05 hectares). The 1998 document also specifically excluded private property that was mistakenly considered as part of the communal territory in the first plan (10.26 hectares), and established the definitive communal territory within an area of 102.75 hectares, which is what it remains to the present day. Of this, in excess of 50% is reserved for the protection of the forest and reforestation, while the remainder is distributed among the members of the community in individual plots for their agrarian use (Simbaña and Simbaña 2007, Tola Chica Community 2007).

In this way, “the [1998] Plan defined the specific zones on how we were going to use our land” (Community member 1, 2013). Indeed, this document included the original 1997 territorial map (shown above in Figure 7.2) with added colouring done by hand – something apparently carried out by the ecologists who by then held leadership positions in the community (Community member 9, 2012; Tola Chica Community 1998). At the same time, another consequence of the land titling of Tola Chica in 1997 became clear around this time. Recall that the “re-founding of the community” in 1997 had brought in new blood to the community. Now, some of the new *comuneros* were close to the national indigenous movement and, via this connection, were able to access funding from the UNDP (i.e. via ECUARUNARI) to build the plant nursery and to conduct the first mass planting of native trees (Community member 1, 2013; Simbaña and Simbaña 2007). As part of the funding application, it was necessary to develop a detailed project proposal that also included a more detailed territorial zoning scheme than had hitherto existed (Community member 3, 2013).

As such, the 1998 Plan considerably expanded on the original recommendations for sustainable activities to be carried out in the territory, specifying for instance in great depth the location-specific ecological characteristics and problems observed in the territory, based on input from the Technical Agrarian Department of ECUARUNARI (Tola Chica Community 1998). Hence, the Plan specified: (1) sustainable cultivation in healthy soils; (2) native vegetation regeneration and reforestation in eroded terrains and in those at high risk of erosion; and (3) conservation of the forest (Tola Chica Community 1998). This territorial ordering deployed expert agricultural and ecological knowledge to translate these general principles into highly-detailed area sizes. The forest, in this schema, was an integral part of this ordering just as much as the cultivation and agro-forestry areas. And yet, unlike government or environmental NGO documents regarding forest conservation (see Chapters 5 and 6), there is no reference

in any of this community planning to elements that may represent a 'pristine' non-human nature or to internationally sanctioned sustainable development terminology. On the contrary, elements clearly related to the rural agricultural world shaped the expression of Tola Chica's ecologism in the 1998 Plan.

By 2007, the Plan was nonetheless in need of an update in order to include it in a project proposal to Spain's San Cugat municipality as part of a funding request to this donor (Tola Chica Community 2007). The update was also an occasion to incorporate some new local thinking that had developed over the intervening period. In particular, Tola Chica's ecologists drew on a new interest in agro-ecology and sustainable architecture that had inspired them from 2002 onwards (via their involvement with the Network of Seeds Guardians). Overall, the 2007 Plan maintained the pre-existing territorial zoning but notably established more precise altitudinal limits to each zone (see Figure 7.3 below). This step was simultaneously an opportunity to develop more ecologically-sensitive and differentiated territorial planning in light of such community interests (Community member 4, 2013; Indigenous representative 3, 2013). The objectives of the zoning were "to restore the eroded soil and the water springs, to recover environmental and soil humidity through ordering productive activities and [to conduct forest] conservation" (Tola Chica Community 2007: 2). At the same time, the zoning changes were a response to broader developments – specifically new legal requirements established by the Municipality of Quito surrounding the conservation status of Ilaló Hill (Burbano and Lasso 2006).



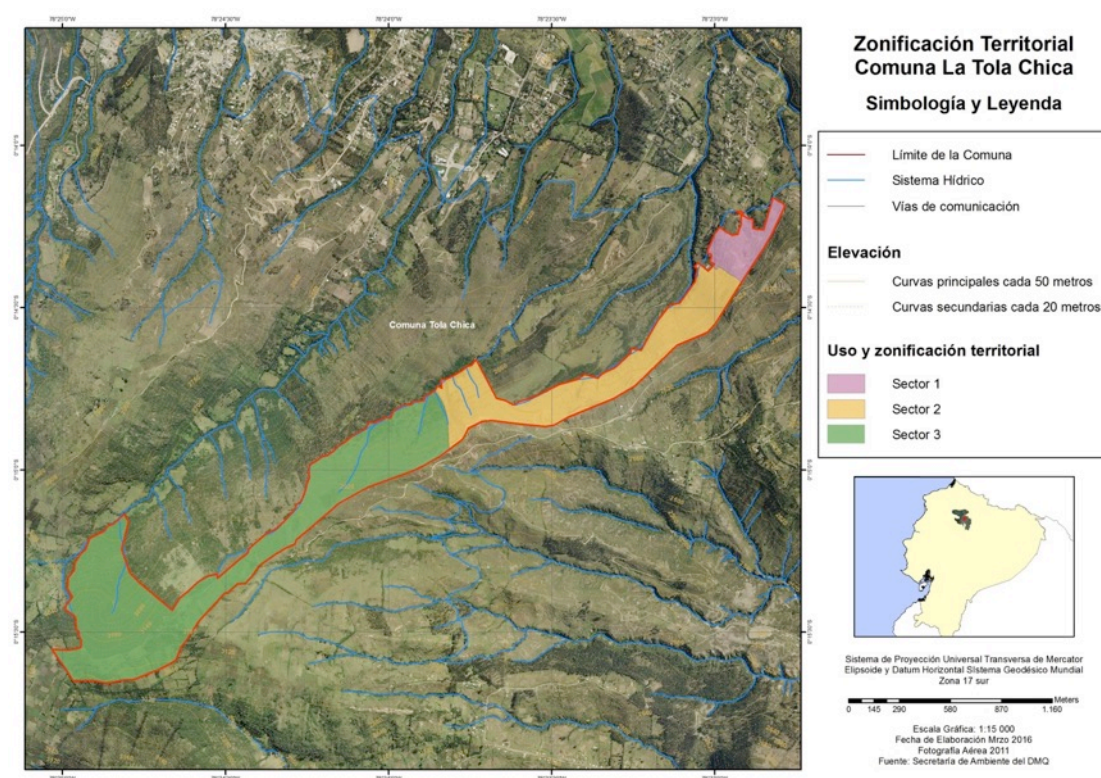


Figure 7.3 Tola Chica's territorial zoning.

Source: Secretariat of Environment, Municipality of Quito. Prepared with the assistance of the Collective of Critical Geography of Ecuador, 2016.

The 2007 Plan was thus notable in that it, among these other things, introduced new social activities, hence, ecological urbanisation, agro-ecology and ecotourism. Such activities were interwoven into the pre-existing scheme. Thus, and broadly speaking, community members were now permitted to build ecological houses, but only in Zone 1. Meanwhile, Zone 2 was dedicated for agro-forestry, forestry and reforestation, while Zone 3 was given over to crops production, reforestation, agro-forestry and forest conservation. Ecotourism and agro-ecology were to be permitted in all three zones (Tola Chica Community 2007).

In this new Plan, the construction of buildings was a novel feature, even as it was carefully circumscribed. Thus, the practice was prohibited in Zones 2 and 3, while being affirmed for Zone 1. But the adjective 'ecological' was all important here. Thus, ecological architecture alluded to precise construction techniques and materials – such as using materials like clay and natural fibres, as well as dry toilets, rainwater harvesting, biological wastewater treatment and renewable energy generation (Tola Chica Community 2007). Indeed, members built a communal house as well as a house for the nurseryman using these techniques and established a system for harvesting



and cleaning rainwater for human use (Community member 3, 2013; Photos 7.6 and 7.7). These efforts were certainly important, too, in symbolic terms as, was noted earlier, these buildings represented the first edifices to be built on the territory – and hence were a new and vivid marker of the community's physical occupation of the territory (Community member 4, 2013).



Photo 7.6 Communal eco-house.  
Source: Author.



Photo 7.7 Nurseryman (on the right) and a visitor (on the left) next to a tank for harvesting and cleaning rainwater for human use.

Source: Tola Chica's Archives.

Such initiatives, as well as others such as ecotourism and agro-ecology (including the creation of local markets without intermediary actors) are promising, even if they are still at an early stage in developing alternative practices from which members of the community can earn an income (Community member 1, 2013; Indigenous representative 4, 2013; see also Tola Chica Community 2007).

In more immediate terms, the zoning has affected the individual choices that members make in their daily lives because the territory is now carefully divided into individual plots and communal land. Hence, 38 hectares (37.3% of the territory) are allocated to individual plots, while 64 hectares (62.7%) are destined for reforestation, forest conservation and collective infrastructure (Simbaña and Simbaña 2007; Tola Chica Community 2007; Group Interview 2, 16/Apr/2013). Each community member who owns a share of community land thus has a right to use three plots of different sizes, one in each zone (see Table 7.1). In this way, “access to each ecological zone and its resources” is guaranteed (Community member 1, 2013), with each family “equally affected and benefited” (Group Interview 2, 16/Apr/2013).

Table 7.1 Communal and individual plots in Tola Chica’s territory

	<b>Zone 1</b>	<b>Zone 2</b>	<b>Zone 3</b>
<b>Altitude</b>	2,400-2,450	2,450-2,600	2,600-3,200
<b>Total area (ha)</b>	10	58	34
<b>Size of the individual lots (sq. m)</b>	650	2700	2500
<b>Total area allocated to community members (ha)</b>	5	18	15
<b>Total area in reserve (ha)</b>	5	40	19

Source: Tola Chica Community 1998; Tola Chica Community 2007; Community member 1, 2013; Community member 4, 2013.

Overall, and as Table 7.1 highlights, this schema of member's individual use of the territory coexists with their collective ownership of it. Thus, in practice, they can use their allocated individual plots freely (for example, to grow the sorts of crops for sale or household use as they see fit), but they must respect the zoning rules detailed in the 2007 Territorial Management Plan (Table 7.2) in so doing.

In comparing the two Territorial Management Plans (i.e. those of 1998 and 2007), it does seem clear that activities set out in the 1998 Plan have also been included in the detailed zoning contained in the 2007 Plan (see Table 7.2 below). That said, it can be seen how a more detailed set of activities features in the latter, notably reflecting the impact of the ecologists – who have been influenced, in turn, by their interactions with environmental NGOs such as Network of Seeds Guardians (RGS) or other

organisations associated with ANA or CEDENMA (Community member 3, 2012; Community member 5, 2012; Community member 9, 2012). Indeed, those community members who were also directly linked to the RGS were instrumental here; two of them had studied at university with one a trained biologist and the other a chemist (Community member 6, 2013; Community member 11, 2012) while two further members studied agro-ecology in Brazil including the former nurseryman (Community member 3, 2013; Community member 5, 2013). Such individual career paths were complemented by the influence of external donors that were in effect environmentally-oriented agencies (such as UNDP or the Ecuadorian Committee of Agroecology) (Community member 5, 2013; Community member 11, 2013).

Table 7.2 Tola Chica's Territorial Management Plans

1998 Plan	2007 Plan
Urbanisation Sustainable cultures: rotation, strip cropping, contour cultivation and living barriers.	<b>ZONE 1:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ecological production: seeds, edible gardens, a plant nursery, water harvesting systems for crops, farming of small animals and South American camelids (llamas, vicuñas, alpacas).</li> <li>• Ecological urbanisation: composting toilets, wastewater systems and water harvesting systems.</li> <li>• Infrastructure: training centre, seed reserve, accommodation for tourists and volunteers.</li> <li>• Commercialisation system for community members: processing area, storage and packaging facility, warehouse and workshops.</li> <li>• Communal life: common laundry, common kitchen and eating room, courts and fields for cultural activities and parking.</li> </ul>
Restoration of vegetation cover and reforestation in eroded soils.	<b>ZONE 2:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reforestation and vegetation cover restoration.</li> <li>• Water springs restoration.</li> <li>• Rainwater harvesting system: canals and reservoirs.</li> <li>• Farming of small animals and South American camelids. Agroecological belts along roads housing native species.</li> <li>• Edible forest.</li> </ul>
Reforestation and conservation of native forest. Silviculture and agroforestry.	<b>ZONE 3:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forest conservation.</li> <li>• Reforestation.</li> <li>• Agroforestry.</li> <li>• Environmental education and ecotourism.</li> <li>• Free farming of South American camelids.</li> </ul>

As such, the 2007 Plan was indeed a more sophisticated document reflecting this accumulated environmental expertise. And yet, that knowledge was deployed in such a way so as to form a comprehensive whole based on integrated human-environmental interaction (e.g. systems to restore eroded and dried-out soils as well as water springs for agriculture; efforts to expand and conserve native forest). In practice, this has meant a combination of nature conservation practices with agricultural activities, denoting thereby that, for Tola Chica members (whether they are trained experts or

not), conservation and agriculture go hand-in-hand in the production of the territory. In that sense, although Tola Chica's ecological practice of recalling scientific approaches and solutions may appear to go hand-in-hand with technocratic environmentalism, they unquestionably affirm the production of socionatures (Castree 2013).

Meanwhile, collective discussions for the development of a new Plan were underway during my fieldwork for this PhD. This latest set of reflections was occasioned by regional political events. Thus, in April 2013, the community learned that the Municipality of Quito proposed to change the conservation status of Ilaló Hill (Community Assembly, 3/Apr/2013). Currently, it is classed as a Special Area of Intervention and Recovery<sup>74</sup> that forms part of Quito's System of Protected Areas and Ecological Corridors (Municipality of Quito 2012). This existing status sets an upper limit on urbanisation at 2,600 metres of altitude (and reflected in Tola Chica's territorial ordering regarding Zone 1); yet the new city proposal for the conservation of Ilaló Hill (Metropolitan Ordinance #447, 21/Oct/2013, Annex 11) would lower that limit to the base of the hill (which is 2,300 metres of altitude). This step, in turn, would remove any possibility of infrastructure construction even in Zone 1 (Community member 4, 2013; Indigenous representative 3, 2013). So, in June 2013, the Assembly resolved to prepare a counter-proposal that, instead of banning urbanization at this altitude altogether, would promote sustainable construction combined with nature conservation and agro-ecology production. Based on this idea, the new Plan was passed on to the community's Technical Commission to draft (Community Assembly, 5/Jun/2013).

The resulting 'Plan of Life' (Technical Commission Meeting, 23/Sep/ 2013) reflected a wish for territorial ordering that included a "definition of a theoretical and philosophical framework: Andean cosmovision as root, sustainability as purpose, and permaculture as methodology and technique" (Community member 4, 2013). In addition, the interest in developing a new Plan reflected another consideration – namely, the on-going necessity to obtain funding with which to complete the construction of the community eco-infrastructure (Community member 3, 2013). In fact, I played a role in the development of this Plan by recording and organizing – together with the Technical Commission - a participatory workshop which occurred in September 2013 that sought to flesh out the new Plan's details (Extra-ordinary Assembly, 25/Sep/2013). My personal involvement in the process here (which was considered in Chapter 3 in

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<sup>74</sup> Areas of communitarian, private or public domains which, due to their physical and socio-economic conditions, prevent natural disasters; have historical-cultural connotations; reduce pressure on the Conservation Areas; allow the functionality, integrity and connectivity of the Protected Areas Network and the Urban Green Network (green corridors); and constitute landmarks of the city. As a result of these characteristics, it is necessary that they be areas of special management (Metropolitan Ordinance #447, 21/Oct/2013, Annex 11).

discussing my ethnographic approach and positionality), helped me to better understand the community dynamics involved in this sort of task (also Community member 4, 2014).

My direct involvement in the process underscored several things to me. On the one hand, it was clear that, as in the past, the community deliberations involved in the constitution of the 2013 Plan was directed by the community's leaders based in the Technical Commission, especially the ecologists (Community member 1, 2013; Indigenous representative 4, 2013). For the latter, there was a clear and consistent discourse that came across vividly in the individual interviews (Community member 4, 2013; Community member 9, 2013).

On the other hand, it was also clear to me that members of the community who are not in leadership or technical positions are not familiar with the maps, documents or legal dispositions (Group Interview 1, 9/Apr/ 2013; Group Interview 2, 16/Apr/2013; Group Interview 3, 20/Apr/2013). However, they certainly know the territory from their own personal experience with it; further, they are very clear too about the activities that are allowed and not allowed in each zone: where the forest and reforestation areas are and, particularly, where they can cultivate crops and build houses. To some extent, they are also aware of the broader purpose of the territorial ordering and the community as well as individual benefits that derive from it. During group interviews, for instance, they asserted:

The division [the territorial zoning] occurred in order that we all have land in all the three [climatic] zones: affected and gifted equally. If you only have access to one, bigger plot – say, in Zone 2, which is dry, or a plot with a huge inclination [slope] - you're screwed. [...] Yes, a while ago Zone 2 was good; all [the crops] ripened well. Then it dried and the people abandoned the zone; they stopped growing food there. Now that they are reforesting, it has recovered somehow (Group Interview 2, 16/Apr/2013).

In Zone 3, we can produce everything. In Zone 2, we have eucalyptus, *guabas*, pines, laurel, small guavas ... only trees. In Zone 1 [...] we have alfalfa, eucalyptus, lemon verbena, rosemary, avocado, laurel, aloe, corn. The native forest is on the [Ilaló] Hill, next to the *Huila*. The reforestation zone is below (Group Interview 3, 20/Apr/2013).

Such detailed knowledge of the entire Tola Chica territory is pertinent here because the forest conservation and reforestation areas are located in the communal areas (i.e. those that have not been parcelled and allocated to individual *comuneros*), while each family grows food and uses pastures (and could potentially build an eco-house) in Zone 1 in their individual plots. In addition, and through *mingas*, the community is involved in the work of expanding the forest as part of an ecological identity forged by the leaders – since at least the year 2000, both the supporters and the ecologists have been largely successful in encouraging the *comuneros* to internalize the need for, and

voluntarily commit to, conserving the forest; and in doing so, both the leadership and the residents produce territory (Erazo 2010; see below). Below, this territorial production is argued to be a means of confronting state-led green capitalism, but here it is to be noted that the reasons that members give for respecting the zoning are multifaceted.

The same multiplicity of thinking underpins why they help to conserve the forest and pursue reforestation activities. First, there is a legal dimension: the land title granted by the state contained explicitly the condition of forest protection and reforestation (see Warrant of Adjudication #141, 31/Oct/1997, section 1). Hence it is believed to some extent that such title could even be removed if the community should fail to comply with this requirement (Community Assembly, 18/Sep/2013). Second, as an indigenous and autonomous community, the Municipality is not obliged to provide basic services (i.e. tap water, energy and sewage) and so people are not able to reside there in any case. Third, all members know that Tola Chica is part of Quito's "Ilaló special intervention and recovery area" which specifically forbids urbanisation above altitudes of 2,600 metres (Municipality of Quito 2012). Fourth, community members display a genuine interest in conserving and expanding the forest, rejuvenating the soils through restoring vegetation cover, and looking for new livelihood alternatives based on sustainable land management practices (Community member 1, 2013; Community member 3, 2013; Community member 4, 2013; Community member 5, 2013; Indigenous representative 4, 2013).

All of which is not to say that conflict is absent – to the contrary, there has been recurrent strife and tension concerning especially the prohibition on building houses beyond Zone 1. Indeed, some community members would like to build houses for themselves and their families in Zone 2, as one member states: "Only Zone 3 should remain [with an outright ban on activities that lead] to [any] reforestation, while the rest [should be made available to community members] for building, as others do" (Community Assembly, 18/Sep/2013). The speaker here is referring to a neighbouring borough that indeed allows construction beyond the official limit, as one interviewee later explained: "there is a settlement in Olalla, up on the [Ilaló] Hill and the Municipality says nothing. I think some people are very angry for not being able to build above [the limit]" (Community member 14, 2013). In fact, during this particular Assembly, at one point a few people publicly railed against the local leadership that, in their view, was not doing its job properly in defending the true interests of the community (Community Assembly, 18/Sep/2013). This sort of intra-community dynamic has been a recurrent element in other Assemblies (Community Assembly, 3/Apr/2013; Community

Assembly, 5/Jun/2013). Take, for example, an Assembly held in April 2013 that I attended in which the possibility of accepting new members into the community was discussed and, if that should happen, how those new members would be made to respect the zoning rules (Community Assembly, 3/Apr/2013). The then-President warned his assembled fellow community members that “If we do not regulate [housing] we are going to have problems, not only with the Municipality [of Quito], but between us” (Indigenous representative 3, 2013). Meanwhile, at the June 2013 Assembly, the members discussed the petition of a *comunero* to build a house (Community Assembly, 5/Jun/2013). In this context, another member observed: “Everybody has to respect our internal norms about planting, respecting distances between neighbours [...] It is our internal ordering, our territorial zoning” to contextualize the prohibition of building houses in Zone 2 (Indigenous representative 4, 2013).

And this issue continued to be a big issue in community discussions. Thus, at the September 2013 Assembly, the matter arose again and occasioned much debate. It occurred when the leadership was presenting a project for the reforestation of Zone 2, and which would necessitate a *minga*. One member proposed that they should be allowed to build houses in Zone 2 and instead reforest Zone 1. But the leadership insisted on reforesting Zone 2, which they pointed out is very dry and hence in need of such restoration work, even as they reminded members of the territorial zoning rules, as well as the permanent requirements that they undertake for forest protection and reforestation work as set out in the 1997 Warrant of Adjudication; the leaders also reminded members of the on-going conflict with the Municipality with reference to the altitudinal upper limits for the urbanisation of Ilaló Hill. All of this discussion and explanation was accompanied by a general murmur of disapproval and/or approval around the room – thereby graphically underscoring intra-community differences. Some members voiced scepticism about the Municipality’s capacity to even control Ilaló Hill’s urbanisation in the first place – but “to avoid any troubles”, replied one leader, “we have our own territorial zoning” (Community member 3, 2013). In the end, the conflict was resolved during the workshop held later in September 2013 where the new Community Management Plan was finalised. In that Plan, approval was now given for the building of a maximum of one small house per plot in the lower section of Zone 2, in conjunction, though, with the production of an edible forest (i.e. fruit trees) as well as agro-forestry measures to promote water restoration there (Extra-ordinary Assembly, 25/Sep/2013).

In sharp contrast to these disagreements over housing, community members were unanimous in their support for the protection of the community’s forest. Indeed, the

collective agreement here was clearly inviolable. Members relate this steadfastness to the manner in which the forest came to be part of the community's territory at the start. Thus, as one member reminded me, Tola Chica came into possession of a patch of Andean forest, a forest remnant embedded within a matrix of degraded and deforested lands, as a result of a trial won against a family of local *hacendados* (Indigenous representative 3, 2013). Upon receipt of these lands, the Assembly decided to conserve the forest (Indigenous representative 4, 2013; Simbaña and Simbaña 2007). Once this decision was made, it was unlikely to be revised, as "what has already been decided is not discussed again; the collective decisions are fully respected" (Community member 5, 2012; also Group Interview 2, 16/Apr/2013). For community members, then, "to reforest and to conserve the forest is to maintain and respect a decision of the community" (Indigenous representative 4, 2013). Indeed, members of the community expressed this stance strongly during a group interview: "[The leadership of that time] left the forest undivided [...] It was after we won a trial; we won it and in an Assembly it was decided [to conserve the forest]. That cannot be changed (I insisted). No, that cannot be changed; that's how it is" (Group Interview 2, 16/Apr/2013).

Rather than adopting a general attitude towards the sanctity of non-human nature, though, the decision here to conserve the forest appears to be grounded, above all, in an acceptance of what was decided collectively and the need to respect that decision. But the story does not end there. Thus, some members would like to gain access to the forest for limited agricultural exploitation – something that was also addressed in the Assembly and in the territorial planning workshop referred to above (Community Assembly, 18/Sep/2013; Extra-ordinary Assembly, 25/Sep/2013). Such access was flatly denied in these meetings, albeit not without discussion. Meanwhile, some members also object to undertaking reforestation with unprofitable native plants: those "old trees aren't worth anything; it is better to plant eucalyptus trees that do give money" (Community member 9, 2012).

These sorts of dissonant voices inside the community do point to the variegated reasoning that underpins the collective decision to protect the forest, and hence problematizes romantic views of indigenous people as nature defenders or protectors (see chapter 6). When the community won the court case against the Peñaherrera family back in the 1970s, the question of how to manage the forest was indeed debated. Here, the diverse testimonies garnered through my interviews reveal a combination of reasons – a multifaceted ecological consciousness, so to speak:



The community has always preserved nature. For example, the father of Don Manuel – Gerónimo - realised that they [i.e. some community members] [intended to] parcel [i.e. sub-divide] the native forest. He realised this, and said: “No! In the future, this could serve the *guambras*<sup>75</sup> who are coming” (Community member 1, 2013).

The avoidance of a scenario of land sub-division was thus intimately connected to the decision to go ahead with the *collective* maintenance of the forest. For some members, it was a decision taken by the elderly almost out of a sense of guilt: hence, they “are conscious [that] they should not have deforested [in their own historic plots on the Hill], they had lived in the past there, and they know how it was” (Community member 10, 2013).

However, the decision to conserve the forest was not simply some sort of ‘ancestral wisdom’ – akin to an uncritical articulation of *buen vivir* and *pachamama*. Rather, it was also a politically-minded and reflexive decision. From both an array of interviews as well as participant observation conducted for this PhD, two more reasons for conserving the forest thus emerged: (1) relating to the historical conditions of land property and labour on Ilaló Hill and its surroundings; coupled with (2) legally-binding commitments under the Law of Communes (and thus the community’s land titles) to conserve the forested land.

On the first point, it is important to be clear what activities had gone on before 1997 in shaping the landscape in the area. Thus, and as Chapter 4 noted, there was only a small forest remnant on the Hill at that time due to prior large-scale wood and charcoal production which had been the principal occupation of many Tumbaco inhabitants and was the main driver of deforestation in the area; yet such activity did not affect the forest patch on the Peñaherrera’s property where it was not allowed. The former nurseryman explained it all thus: “The [now] elderly had extracted wood and charcoal for selling in Quito [when they were younger]. They stopped the extraction when there was nothing left; the Ilaló Hill was ‘peeled’ but the patch remained there because it was on the Peñaherrera’s land” (Community member 3, 2013). In a manner of speaking, a measure of guilt about past practices was behind the collective decision on the remnant forest once they had gained legal ownership of it.

In any event, by the time that Tola Chica won the trial against the Peñaherrera family, and hence became the owner of the forest patch in question, community members were already dedicated to other jobs (i.e. not wood or charcoal production), even as they cultivated individual agrarian plots within the territory for their own use (Indigenous

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<sup>75</sup> *Guambras*: kids in Kichwa.

representative 4, 2013). Seen in this light, then, there was no need or even temptation to deforest this new land containing remnant forest.

On the second point, meanwhile, the Law of Communes, which underpins Tola Chica's legal rights and access to the land, places a prohibition on dividing up "paramos and the lands for planting forests" (Republic of Ecuador 1937[2004], Art. 17, section f). This legal restriction was enforced when the community obtained the land titles – at which time, as noted earlier, they were required to produce a management plan that included reforestation and forest conservation measures (Warrant of Adjudication #141, 31/Oct/1997). In amongst this combination of reasons for forest conservation, however, one thing came across very clearly in the interviews: namely, that although the survival of the forest remnant was a reflection of specific historical circumstances linked to who owned what land when, the subsequent decision to conserve it by Tola Chica has reflected an active and conscious choice of the Assembly (Indigenous representative 4, 2013; Group Interview 2, 16/Apr/2013).

While this Tola Chica decision, as with others assessed in this chapter, thus did not take place without debate, the end-result from the vantage-point of today is of a collective management effort based in a political calculation aligned to the carefully-regulated production of territory which embodies the type of ecologism that the Tola Chica perform – a theme further explored next.

#### **7.4.2 Communitarian territory production**

To get a better sense of how the community's production of territory has proceeded in tension with the state's own territorial production impetus (following Haesbaert 2011), consider once more, what happened when the *Programa Socio Bosque* (PSB) approached Tola Chica in 2011. As noted, the approach was rejected outright (Community member 1, 2013; Community member 3, 2013). The leaders who were closest to the national indigenous organization, and most aware of how the PSB was perceived elsewhere in the country, were especially vocal, labelling the PSB "an interventionist project of indigenous communities' spaces" (Indigenous representative 4, 2013), even one that was engaging in "rightist environmentalism" (Indigenous representative 3, 2013). Meanwhile, among the ecologists, the programme exhibited blindness on the part of the State in terms of acknowledging the conservation labour that Tola Chica members had been undertaking "since the beginning of the community's institutional life" (Community member 1, 2013). This interviewee also recalled a key exchange with the PSB visitors:

We told them that this is an exclusionary model that does not allow us to do many things in liberty. They said ‘that is a lie – you will be able to do whatever you want in your territory; we have nothing to do with that’. They said they were going to do a species [biodiversity] assessment and take pictures of the [conservation] status of the forest. Then, they were going to pay us, but if the forest was damaged there would be a penalty fine because they were paying us to take care [of the forest]. So we analysed that and said: no thank you (Community member 1, 2013).

As such, the programme provoked local distrust, at least among the community’s leaders, about the imposition of limits on territorial autonomy that was decidedly unwelcome. Beyond this, however, the key point was that state interference in communal territorial practices (as epitomised by the PSB) would undermine Tola Chica’s ability to produce its territory according to its own needs, a preoccupation shared with both the national indigenous organisation (CONAIE) and critical ecologists (Chapter 6). The former nurseryman succinctly summarised the issue:

[Community members] opted to not accept [the PSB] because we are linked to the territory in such a form that we feel it’s ours, and not for money. We don’t want to feel that we are entering some foreign [land] and will not be allowed to do any little thing there (Community member 3, 2013).

In this testimony, the prospect of restrictions on community labour in the territory in order to comply with state regulations was simply not acceptable, even where they shared the same aims of conserving the forest. Moreover, having developed expertise in this area, the community felt confident in challenging the state’s technical authority of *how* to conserve the forest as part of a wider territorial management. Consequently, the community is disputing the production of territory and succeeding in imprinting its intentionality on the ground (Hasbeaert 2011):

We proposed the opposite to them. Our counter-proposal was to not get paid but that they should recognise the labour we carry out in taking care of the forest. It is not like they are doing us a favour, but that [they] acknowledge [our labour conserving the forest] and, in exchange, [the PSB officers] can propose some actions to take care of the forest (Community member 3, 2013).

In this interchange, there can be seen the assertion of a strongly collective place-based ethnic identity (resonant of the notions of *pachamama* and *buen vivir*) that points to a possible alternative to green capitalism. Indeed, the former Tola Chica community president and CONAIE leader explicitly affirmed this resonance when he noted that “*buen vivir* makes sense in the community” (Indigenous representative 3, 2013). But it only makes sense in the community in the context of a collective sense of and commitment to communal labour dedicated to the production of nature and territory. Take, for instance, a report that was prepared by the community’s Technical Commission in 2007 in order to obtain funding that firmly emphasises this collective work angle:

Among the main accomplishments of the community are the improvement of the vicinity's roads and the construction of the church in [the urban] borough; also, the biggest work was for the valley's education – the Tumbaco School - and the construction of six kilometres of the Ilaló Hill main road, both providing services to various boroughs and communities of Tumbaco; similarly, projects of reforestation and regeneration of the Ilaló ecosystem (Simbaña and Simbaña 2007: 5).

Much here depends on how the local sense of 'community' is articulated with the local appreciation of territory. After all, the fragmented nature of the Tola Chica territory could have been a problem that might have hindered political and social cooperation and organisation. But, for one former community leader, this was not a problem at all because:

We must distinguish between [the physical] territory and the social relations, which are not circumscribed to the territory, although they are reproduced there. There is this idea that the territory is the space where *all* social relations occur; however, if we are talking about indigenous peoples, the territory serves to reproduce their culture, but their lives occur *outside* the territory too. The territory is not a closed box; it is not a geographic idea; it does not exist by itself. It has to be linked to a social need; it is not an empty field. This is why there are no territories in the city. [The territory] exists when there is a government; if there is no government, there is no territory, even if there is a collective land title (Indigenous representative 3, 2013).

From this perspective, the community is not only a form of local officially-sanctioned government attached to a physical territory; it also embodies the social relations that are created and strengthened among the *comuneros* as part of the process of managing the territory. In fact, the views that I recorded was thus hearing at Tola Chica echoed a wider insight that was summarised by the indigenous and intellectual leader of CONAIE, Luis Macas. In his view, "the community is the nuclear organization of the current peasant and indigenous society; it is the institution that articulates and gives coherence to the indigenous society" (Macas 2001: 92). For example, it soon became apparent in the fieldwork that, for members of the community I interviewed, 'territory', 'community', 'assembly' and, in general, all the collective activities being carried out in the name of the community, were in effect interchangeable terms, even as they also signified a collective form of life *and* communal government. Thus, in both individual and collective interviews, when I asked where the communal territory is, the members invariably would answer "the *community* is up on the Ilaló Hill" (e.g. Indigenous representative 4, 2013; Community member 10, 2013; and also Group Interview 1, 9/APR/ 2013; Group Interview 2, 16/APR/2013; Group interview 3, 20/APR/2013). Similarly, 'community' is used to refer to the assembly as the space and moment where all the *comuneros* gather for decision-making (Community member 1, 2013; Community member 9, 2013; Community member 12, 2013; Group interview 3, 20/APR/2013).

So, if the territory is the material expression of *dialectical* power relationships (Smith 2010, Haesbaert 2011), then the community (i.e. the communal government and the social relations that occur between *comuneros*) constitute the opposing force that challenge the national state (i.e. the *Programa Socio Bosque* and all the social relations that it aims to produce) in a dialectical way; it is the community in confrontation with the state, both trying to imprint themselves on the ground, which results in the communal territory as I saw it (Mançano Fernandes 2005). Again, here is what the former community leader had to say about it:

The territory stands for autonomy – for example, for food sovereignty - but it is also a cultural space, a space of belonging from which I relate with the world. It is political: how I present myself to the world. It is economical: where I am sustained. But we shall not [assume the territory as a] refuge from the state; there will be always a tension between the community's territory and the state's [territory] (Indigenous representative 3, 2013).

According to the multidimensionality described in the testimony, the communal territory is produced through the labour of reforestation, protection of the forest and agricultural production; the institutions and norms to govern the territory (*mingas*, assemblies territorial planning, maps and zoning rules) and through symbolic activities that maintain community life (festivals, pilgrimages, kin relations).

It is also within this multidimensionality that the encounter with *pachamama* occurs, as one community member asserted: “the community is a living being; it is the space of the *pachamama*, where we live and that we defend. Without territory, there is no *pachamama*” (Indigenous representative 4, 2013). The encounter with *pachamama* and thus with the production of nature is also communal. The edible forest, reforestation, the conviviality of ecological houses, pastures, crops and ancient trees – all tend to reflect a nature that is produced *in the community* which is inescapably social. And herein is to be found the main difference between the community and state forms of forest conservation and nature production, as well as those put forward by environmental NGOs that privilege individual courses of action for creating an idea of non-human nature that ended up reproducing the same structures of exclusion and exploitation (Heynen *et al.* 2007, Apostolopoulou and Adams 2014, Asiyanbi 2016). From such positionality, it can be seen how the behaviour of a community such as Tola Chica (and other communities around the country like them) might be understood as posing a potentially formidable challenge to the state and its growing green capitalist ethos (as well as its on-going conventional extractivist practices and interests).

If this is correct, then discussions about the conservation of nature or the achievement of *buen vivir* are matters for the political sphere where the essential question is: what is

the socio-political form that is needed in order to produce nature and territory in ways that do not harm *both* humans and non-humans. This is, of course, a question that animates eco-socialists, critical geographers and others sympathetic to the production of nature thesis (Smith 2007; see Chapter 2).

And here is where the notion of *buen vivir* can be brought into play. In this regard, the key elements of *buen vivir* are inextricably linked with communal life. For one of Tola Chica's leaders, the two can only ever be fully understood through experience:

The intellectuals want to understand what we, from the community, understand in practice. The practices of *buen vivir* would be love and respect for the earth, respect for the communitarian space, the territory; and respect for the authority, which is the Assembly represented by the leadership, and harmony within the family and between families (Indigenous representative 4, 2013).

In this context, it is true that the most frequently cited elements of *buen vivir* in the literature – things such as reciprocity, mutual aid, communal goods, solidarity, social responsibility, collective discussion and respect for others (see Chapter 2) - are to be observed in Tola Chica's communal life. Indeed, members themselves habitually refer to solidarity, reciprocity, a sense of belonging and the possibility of constructing alternative ways of living:

The community could decide to design an agro-ecological life, to declare, for example, a GMO-free territory; the community offers a unique possibility for a life like that. You can count on others, for example for security: burglars do not steal in indigenous communities because they know the entire community will chase them. There is collective work and solidarity, even between members who do not get along with each other. I want to be part of that (Community member 5, 2012).

The Assemblies, for example, are outstanding demonstrations of deliberative democracy and collective decision-making. During the ones that I attended, the members routinely placed the leadership under intense scrutiny; people were not at all shy about calling to account their leaders and the claims that they made on the community's behalf.

That being said, communities were also exclusionary spaces: women for instance participate little in the open discussions; and there is a lack of representation of young people too. On the one side, although 45.3% of the *comuneros* are women (and hence their voice is heard at election time), they are nonetheless underrepresented in the vital deliberative processes that occur between the elections. The youth, on the other side, despite accounting for 62.8% of Tola Chica's population, represent only 23.4% of

*comuneros* below the age of 40 years<sup>76</sup> (Tola Chica's Census Book 2012). During the fieldwork, the leadership acknowledged the risks associated with the lack of young people holding positions of power, but did not do so in relation to the limited role of women in the deliberations (Technical Commission Meeting, 13/May/2013).

Beyond these intra-community inequities, a sense of frustration with the perceived strictures of community requirements – notably around the management of common land - did come to the surface from time to time, thereby introducing the need for caution in sweeping statements of community solidarity and 'oneness' (see also Erazo 2013). For example, during the Assemblies members did in fact complain frequently of the duties that they had to perform linked to communal life: participation in and monetary contributions to *mingas*, legal hearings, parties, and so on. And yet despite such social chafing, belonging to the community was habitually expressed to me to be the only way that they knew how to be "autonomous and self-responsible for one's future" (Community member 3, 2013; also Community member 1, 2012; Community member 9, 2013); put differently, "everything is finished when you are no longer a *comunero*" as one meeting attendee bluntly put it (Community's Council Meeting, 31/Mar/2013).

From this perspective then, for community members, fragmentation of the territory is undoubtedly the main threat to communal life and indeed for life as they know it. During the Assemblies, on-going strife over land tenure was prominent. For instance, in 2013, the community was involved in a long drawn-out lawsuit (started ten years earlier) against a few disgruntled former community members who had destroyed the first plant nursery and attacked the former nurseryman and his family (Community member 3, 2012). As the community leadership saw it, this sort of strife was serious in that it potentially gave the city the opportunity to start to intrude on community life. But they were dead set against such a move: hence, they would not "allow the Municipality to enter [the territory]", referring to the threats to transform the communities into urban boroughs by "giving individual land titles" (Community Council Meeting, 31 March 2013). These were not idle fears either insofar as it is perceived as a general trend affecting other indigenous communities in the country. As a leader of CONAIE explained:

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<sup>76</sup> As explained previously, the *comuneros* are members of the community who bought a share of the land title; their children or grandchildren can themselves become *comuneros* only by inheritance. The *comuneros* are obliged to participate in the Assemblies and the collective work (*mingas*), and are entitled to vote in the decisions, and to elect and to be elected for leadership positions (Tola Chica's statutes).

The territories near the city, and more commonly in the Sierra, are rapidly urbanising without consultation [to indigenous peoples]. The purpose of this is to collect taxes [...], to individualise and to control, to break the communitarian space. The indigenous peoples are always looking for spaces to regroup; for example, the immigrants [to the cities] remain rooted to their communities (Indigenous Representative 2, 2013).

Rank-and-file community members echoed these concerns; for instance, one of them told me that the conflicts with the Municipality of Quito are attempts to “destroy the communities” (Community member 9, 2012). In all this, the tension between indigenous communities and local governments revolves around the issue of the autonomous character of indigenous territories (discussed in Chapter 4; see also Republic of Ecuador, 2008, Art. 57).

An important part of this tension arises from a situation in which sub-national governments are not obliged to provide basic services to indigenous territories despite it being considered an obligation of government (Group Interview 1, 9/Apr/ 2013; Group Interview 2, 16/Apr/2013; Territorial Planning Workshop, 25/Sep/2014; Simbaña and Simbaña 2007). The end result is that, in order to gain access to such vital things as tap water, roads or energy, indigenous communities have to set up a collective fund, negotiate funding or materials with local governments, NGOs or private companies, and work in *minga*. This is the case for Tola Chica community, whose members have built the local road and installed electricity within the territory, “working in *minga* and getting material from the Provincial government and other institutions” (Group Interview 2, 16/Apr/2013).

Yet the majority of communities such as Tola Chica are vulnerable precisely because they are trapped in harsh conditions of poverty (recall that income poverty affects 54% of the indigenous population, compared to 20% of mestizo, 45% of *montubio* and 33% of Afro Ecuadorian populations – see INEC 2012). So for many of these communities, the possibility of accessing even basic services is a de facto driver for the dismantling of the communal territories (Community member 9, 2012; Indigenous Representative 2, 2013). Indeed, a document prepared by the Institute of the City (which is a research agency that is part of the Municipality of Quito) affirms that administrative and territorial tension “is one of the reasons many ancestral communities have ceased to recognise themselves as such and have preferred to become urban boroughs, even to access municipal basic services” (Institute of the City 2013: 33).

However, this issue has not been resolved in Tola Chica. As such, it represents an on-going source of conflict between community members, as some of them would prefer to divide up the community land in order “to sell the land and recover what they have



spent in *mingas* and parties” (Community member 10, 2013). Yet such territorial fragmentation would also threaten the maintenance of the community’s forest as well as the larger ability of Tola Chica to politically confront a green capitalism seeking to make inroads on their territory.

At the time that my fieldwork ended, the future of the community was up in the air – and this, despite the keen efforts to articulate an alternative vision by its leaders and other members. The Tola Chica territorial planning that I mentioned above has now been translated into a fully-fledged proposal to reform the 2013 Metropolitan Ordinance that seeks to re-organise how conservation occurs on Ilaló Hill, having been prepared in consultation with other communities and inhabitants of the area (Proposal SA-STHVT 21-09-14; Community member 4, 2013). Broadly speaking, this proposal builds on the Tola Chica experience. Thus, it proposes three zones (conservation areas, areas of special intervention and recuperation, and areas of urban consolidation) for territorial organisation. At the same time, it also draws on that community’s experience through its emphasis on such activities as agro-ecology, the edible forest and eco-building. In short, it sets out a new approach to nature conservation (new, that is, for the Quito authorities and some other communities signed up to it) within a setting of urban development in which the human population is no longer seen as the exploiter of nature but rather as its producer. Concurrently, it assumes that the prevalence of forest remnants on the Ilaló Hill is linked precisely to the contemporary ability of the local communities to produce their own space notably in dialectical tension with the local government, in eventual waves of territorialisation, de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation of communities and the state (Mançano Fernandes 2005, Hasbeaert 2011). To sum it up, the Ilaló Hill is a produced multi-territory not necessarily determined *only* by state power, but rather, it is the multi-dimensional and multi-scalar actions of diverse groups, different *intentionalities* trying to imprint themselves on the ground, that has produced this territory (Haesbaert 2007).

The communal production of nature and territory has been seen to be an important form of confrontation against green capitalism, understood herein to take the form of state-linked nature conservation programmes or plans such as the PSB that aim to produce nature directly as a commodity or to save it as an accumulation strategy (Smith 2007). To be sure, the communal will to conserve the forest as part of a wider communal territorial ordering is not devoid of struggle itself – even as indigenous territories such as Tola Chica remain embedded within a matrix of capitalist relations of production – nor does it exclude pursuing market-based activities such as ecotourism. Certainly, many relationships between members of the community are already

mediated by monetary exchange and capitalist relations (Indigenous representative 3, 2013). As such, the sorts of resistance to the intrusion of green capitalism onto indigenous lands highlighted in this PhD do not mean that capitalism is not already territorialized. Instead, the point is that resistance – in all of its complexity - is about the creation and maintenance of a politicised space where local people can control the production process, which can even include a portion of non-capitalist social relations or the production of use values rather than only exchange values. Again, this is a political discussion on what is the socio-political form that is needed in order to produce nature and territory in ways that will harm *neither* humans nor non-humans (Smith 2007, Swyngedouw 2015).

## 7.5 Summary

This chapter has focused on the case of the indigenous community of Tola Chica as part of the larger exploration in this PhD of how far the ingredients of an alternative environmental politics to green capitalism can be located, notably based around the nationally and internationally recognised notions of *buen vivir*, *pachamama* and territory, as they might have become manifest in the experiences of specific communities such as Tola Chica.

Overall, and in recounting the history and contemporary experiences of this community, a complex picture was seen to have emerged. On the one hand, there was clear evidence for the articulation of a set of community visions and practices since 1997 that bespoke a number of these elements, including an integrated understanding of community and territory, a political sensitivity to the importance of articulating a strong indigenous attachment to the territory in question (not the least in relation to international donors keen to see such an attachment), a community-wide dedication to the integrated production of socionature both on individual plots and communal lands (i.e. the forest) and a place-based ecologism that approaches the environmental issues as profoundly social and political. On the other hand, the chapter showed how nature and territory are produced in opposition to the state (e.g. PSB, Quito's new plans for the Ilaló Hill) and how fragile many of these efforts are due to such things as internal political differences and differentiated perceptions about how important a unified and communally-run territory is to the long-term economic interests of its members (Erazo 2013, 2015). It is, in short, a politically-complex scenario in which the struggle against larger forces allied to green capitalism can be discerned in the practices of community members in their daily lives, even as those lives remain partly also shaped by and

subject to the financial temptations of a ubiquitous capitalism that not everyone agrees is inevitably a 'bad' thing.

The previous three chapters have presented the main empirical findings of the thesis in relation to the core concerns surrounding the political viability and articulation of notions of *buen vivir*, rights of nature, *pachamama* and territory in the context of environmental contestation in present-day Ecuador. These notions have animated (to a greater or lesser extent) both oppositional groups and pro-state forces constituting a diverse Ecuadorian environmentalism, where underlying philosophies and practices, notably about the definitions of 'nature' and 'territory', and how humans and nature ought to interact, remain divergent. The next chapter will summarise in more detail the main findings of this thesis even as it thereafter sets out possible lines of future investigation in light of those findings.

## Chapter 8 Conclusion

This thesis has assessed how various key actors in Ecuadorian environmentalism have understood and deployed ideas about *buen vivir*, the rights of nature or *pachamama* and territory in seeking to shape nature conservation ideas and strategies in this country. Notable here was how two locally-articulated ideas became part of the 2008 Constitution – *buen vivir* and the rights of nature - and with what political ecology effects as they became embedded, in turn, in debates about territory (associated with ideas about ‘plurinationality’). The key interest in this PhD thesis has been to analyse how far these various notions have been a help or a hindrance to the development of alternatives to green capitalism practices being unrolled across the country, notably in connection with state action.

That interest is reflected in the three interlinked research questions guiding this study: (1) how far and in what ways do the ideas about *buen vivir*, nature and territory interact with the diverse types of Ecuadorian environmentalism?; (2) how far is the underlying rationality or ethos reflected in these notions capable of challenging the internationally-circulated sustainable development views and practices that currently infuse efforts to pursue green capitalism in Ecuador?; and (3) whether any of these three notions might form the basis for a coherent political strategy to oppose green capitalism?

The structure of the thesis was designed to reflect these questions. Thus, and starting with Chapter 1 where they were first introduced and initially considered, followed by Chapter 2 where an appropriate theoretical framework based around political ecology and critical geography sought to situate them in the wider context of the scholarly literature, and on to Chapter 3 where the methodology was established so as to clarify how they would be explored empirically, the initial chapters setting the stage for the empirical study that followed. Chapter 4 thereafter initiated that study by providing an overview of the Ecuadorian research context, while Chapters 5-7 explored the research questions in relation to key actors and activities broadly grouped around three key foci: state-related environmental activity, non-governmental environmental actions, and local community-based ecologism.

And finally, this chapter now concludes the study by first summarizing its main findings, organized according to the research questions and engaging with the theoretical framework set out in Chapter 2, before discussing possible future lines of research inquiry that emanate from this thesis.

## 8.1 Key findings and main contributions

### 8.1.1 *Buen vivir*, nature and territory among Ecuadorian environmentalists

The first research question was intended to explore the different types of environmentalism found in Ecuador today and how they interact with the notions of *buen vivir*, rights of nature or *pachamama* and territory. The overall argument being that the different types of environmentalism are contingent on how groups perceive politics and how they understand nature. However, it was shown that an assumed distinction between mainstream environmentalists and popular ecologists is not as sharp as stated in the reviewed literature on the topic (following Guha and Martínez-Alier 1997, Martínez-Alier 2002 see Latorre-Tomás 2009, Varea and Barrera 1997, Castree 2001; contrast with Bebbington and Humphreys-Bebbington 2009). Moreover, the development of environmental thought and political activism must be understood in the light of the country's ecological history as does the prevalence of the anti-extractivist branch among critical ecologists and the emergence of the notion of the rights of nature.

The first research foci, examined in Chapter 5, considered how state environmentalism has sought to refashion ideas about *buen vivir* and nature (contained within the notion of the rights of nature), both to justify an officially-sanctioned development model and to provide an opening for a set of new practices and ideas revolving around an increasingly internationally fashionable regime of green capitalism. Key here was analysing how, through such benchmark documents as the National Plan for Good Living and the 2008 Constitution, these ideas were mainstreamed into public policy. Thus, Chapter 5 illustrated how *buen vivir* was deployed to denote a refashioned form of development with elements of economic equity, environmental sustainability and cultural diversity added to the mix, all of which are simultaneously seen to resonate with sustainable development. Likewise, the rights of nature are narrowly interpreted so as to be, in effect, a guiding principle for managing the distribution of costs within a development model that remains based on the extraction of natural resources (mainly oil and minerals). As such, the rights of nature became a form of scientific administration of nature that departs from the approach of nature as *subject*, like it was first presented in the Constitution. This de facto use of these notions is seen as more closely linked to the technocratic environmentalism and rationale associated with green capitalism. This particular application of the notions also contrasts powerfully with a state-linked discursive campaign that depicted them as being part of a wider critique of a linear model of economic development, even part of a so-called 'decolonial' agenda

put about by Latin American writers and intellectuals keen to embed the Andean-Amazon indigenous people's knowledge and cosmovision into public policy across the continent (Gudynas and Acosta 2011, Leff 2015).

However, as was shown later in the Chapter when analysing the PSB, technocratic environmentalism is nothing more than business-as-usual capitalism in disguise, not 'real' green capitalism (Böhm *et al.* 2012, Brand and Wissen 2013). Indeed, Chapter 5 emphasised how, through programmes such as the PSB, state-linked technocratic environmentalism has gradually but inexorably sought to drain *buen vivir* and the rights of nature of their critical meaning and, with it, the possibility of advancing a 'decolonial' agenda that might seriously challenge the political, economic and ecological status quo. More than that, though, these ideas have been integrated into public policy via a wider strategy of territorial ordering that enables *both* business-as-usual development and new profit-seeking opportunities. The potency of using the notions to reveal the colonial difference, as was espoused by decolonial writers, therefore, has been diluted (Coronil 2000, Garcés 2007, Grosfoguel 2007). On the contrary, the PSB is at the heart of state-linked technocratic environmentalism as it fundamentally produces a particular kind of socionature – a soon-to-be commodity – and has in effect become a sophisticated vehicle by which the state disputes the production of indigenous territories.

The second research foci – the focus of attention in Chapter 6 – then traced alternative understandings of *buen vivir*, nature and territory (as they notably pertain to forest conservation initiatives) in the non-state realm populated by NGOs, some of who clearly opposed state-led technocratic environmentalism. At this point of the study, the three-type characterization of environmentalism is critically examined (see Guha and Martínez-Alier 1997, Martínez-Alier 2002).

Thus, for example, mainstream environmental organizations, which were little involved in the process that ended up with the inclusion of *buen vivir* and the rights of nature in the 2008 Constitution, have tended to perceive environmental issues not as a matter of social struggle but rather as one of technical management akin to the 'gospel of eco-efficiency' (Guha and Martínez-Alier 1997). In contrast, this PhD has revealed how critical ecologists, acting together with Leftist political activists and indigenous representatives, were involved in negotiations that culminated in the inclusion of both notions in the Constitution. Crucially, the inclusion of those terms in the Constitution was the result of the struggle by 'critical' ecologists who had been supporting local people who defended their livelihoods from the extractive industries (Martínez-Alier

2002, Bebbington and Humphreys-Bebbington 2009, Acosta and Martínez 2009, 2011). As such, critical ecologists sought to advance social change through everyday political practice as distinct from post-materialist environmentalism, as notably espoused by Guha and Martínez-Alier (1997).

Scholars often present the notions as new paradigms that described post-colonial, post-neoliberal or post-development futures (e.g. the compilations of SENPLADES 2010, Farrah and Vasapollo 2011, Bretón *et al.* 2014, Lang and Mokrani 2014) and a renewed understanding of the human-nature interconnectedness (Acosta and Martínez 2011, Gudynas 2009). But significantly, Chapter 6 showed that the views of critical ecologists are not homogenous when offering a vision of *integrated* human-nature dynamics or in rejecting sustainable development. It was also shown that sustainable development – or *buen vivir* – is desired by many and perceived to be attainable by transiting to a post-extractive economy. Certainly, ‘critical’ or ‘popular’ ecologism in Ecuador is dominated by the ‘anti-extractivist’ discourse which does not necessarily exhibit an anti-development, not even post-development, stance as some Latin American political ecologists have argued (see for example Acosta and Martínez 2011, Gudynas 2009, 2016, Machado 2012, Alimonda 2015). Moreover, when confronting the extractive industries, some critical ecologists ended up mystifying non-human nature on the basis of the notion of the rights of nature and a misinterpretation of *pachamama*, as some scholars have warned (Sánchez-Parga 2011, 2014, Stefanoni 2014). Hence the overall argument here is that, despite many efforts to integrate nature into human history, or to embed humanity into universal nature, the anti-extractivist branch of critical ecologism maintains an understanding of external, non-human nature, along with an abiding desire for ‘development’.

It should be borne in mind that an important feature of Latin American political ecology is its desire to dialogue with indigenous knowledge (Toledo 1999, Leff 2006, 2015, Machado 2012). Hence the risk of assimilating indigenous thought with post-material environmentalism must be seriously considered (Bebbington 2004, Peet and Watts 2004, Escobar 2008) especially when addressing other more complex and nuanced appreciations of ‘nature’ and *pachamama* that were circulating through Ecuadorian civil society and its NGO community, notably at the behest of indigenous organisations. Indigenous representatives, for example, depicted *pachamama* in different ways to their ecologist counterparts – on the one side, they linked this notion to indigenous struggles for *land* and *territory* dating from the 1960s, and on the other side, they used it to integrate humans and nature through a position based on the active *production* of communal territory. Even here, though, there was complexity in NGO action. Hence,

some indigenous leaders and representatives propounded the idea of *pachamama* as a condition devoid of human activity because of their strategic calculations in high-stakes political activity where, for example, the need to see off the threat of proposed extractivism in their territory was urgent and paramount – and best handled via this sort of conceptual deployment. Again, the urgency of this demand by the opposition to the extractive industries prevents an interpretation of nature that understands the historical richness and specificity of indigenous thought and hence could enrich critical ecologism (Bebbington 2004, Sánchez-Parga 2011, 2014).

This acknowledgment leads to the third focus of the research, the main concern of Chapter 7, which elaborates the analysis undertaken in the latter part of Chapter 6 by exploring in greater depth the issue of local community-based ecologism and, in particular, how *buen vivir*, nature and territory can be seen to be intertwined in it. Such an analysis required a detailed historical and contemporary account of the embedded case study of Tola Chica community and its declared ecologism.

From the outset, the Tola Chica community appeared to confound conventional expectations of the history and practice of indigenous people in Ecuador. Thus, the local history revealed a complex story of strife between community members and a family of powerful *hacendados* going back to the 1970s in which *comuneros* were far from blame-less in the ecological degradation of Ilaló Hill; indeed, many had made their living, as we saw, from activities (such as charcoal production) that were instrumental in widespread deforestation. Hence, the residual forest patch that became part of their territory was an outcome of accident more than anything else.

Yet forest conservation activities became an important concern of Tola Chica once the community received full legal affirmation in 1997. Chapter 7 highlighted two reasons for this: (1) older residents expressed some sentiments of guilt about their previous livelihood, even as that livelihood had disappeared with the felling of most local forests, necessitating a search for new activities; (2) legal constraints had been introduced in the land titles (that were obtained by the community in 1997) that enforced forest conservation as part of the new state-sanctioned territorial ordering. In short, the community's decision to conserve the forest was not entirely due to an environmental consciousness, at least at first. However, in this case, the historical process has given rise to a particular type of ecologism that does not exclude technocratic and ecocentric views, neither it is pure 'popular' or 'critical' ecologism (Guha and Martinez-Alier 1997), thus putting into question the validity of such categorizations. Rather, what is distinctive



of this place-based ecologism is that it understands nature as socially produced together with territory (Castree 2001, 2013, Smith 2010, Haesbaert 2011).

This sort of ecologism was at first heavily influenced by the international discourse of sustainable development promoted by the UNDP; hence Tola Chica's ecologists initially adopted a techno-centric tendency. Indeed, when in 2000 Tola Chica became actively involved in various environmental projects through its strong links to the national indigenous movement (considered initially in Chapter 6), which in turn had connections to international agencies that were promoting environmental concerns. As the community's awareness of environmental issues grew (albeit unevenly) in tandem with such outside organizations, knowledge was further enhanced via engagement with national environmental organizations (such as the RGS and CEA) and associated nationally and internationally-funded ecological projects (notably, the project jointly funded by the municipality of San Cugat in Catalonia and the local provincial government). But as Chapter 7 also argued, this was no simple story of external influence generating local indigenous ecological knowledge. Instead, community members developed diverse ecological interests of their own. So while the influence of the agro-ecology discourses and practices grew, the sustainable development rationale was not completely abandoned, nor were some ecocentric approaches.

Thus even as the whole community may be identified as the prototype of popular ecologism, ecological interests were not homogenous nor equally distributed across the entire community. Rather, it emerged out of distinct alliances within the community. What is more, growing ecological interest was also marked by recurrent confrontation over the production of territory, particularly regarding the conservation of the forest (but also reforestation, ecological urbanization and agroecology). We thus saw how Tola Chica's ecologism is strongly politicized, as local power relationships shape conservation outcomes (and that is before even considering how exclusionary practices within the community constrain both women's and young people's ability to participate in decision-making processes as full and equal partners). But what remains at the core of Tola Chica's ecologism is how the community as a whole (e.g. through their collective action) understands nature and territory as socially produced.

In sum, the three-fold framing that proposed the novel concept of 'ecologism of the poor' or 'popular ecologism' that has strongly influenced Latin American political ecology (Guha and Martínez-Alier 1997, Martínez-Alier 1991, 2002; see Varea and Barrera 1997, Latorre-Tomás 2009 for the Ecuadorian case, contrast with Bebbington and Humphreys-Bebbington 2009) was crucial for placing environmental struggles of

the South as matters of power and colonial relationships. However, this PhD has shown that the categories are not discrete and that many types of environmentalism coexist in one group, as the outcomes of history and local experiences. These findings contribute to the political ecology of environmentalism as political action (Heynen *et al.* 2007), insofar as it was shown that in Ecuador the dominance of the anti-extractivist character of critical ecologism – which emerged out of the ideas of ‘popular ecologism’ - and its discourse hinders the conceptualization of an alternative environmental politics. Thus a main objective of this PhD was to draw a political ecology of environmentalism beyond the assessment of conflicts – e.g. the confrontation with the extractive industry - to assess whether the critique to green capitalism provides a much more effective approach that may help to repoliticize the environment, a main concern of political ecology (Bryant and Bailey 1997, Swyngedouw 2015).

### **8.1.2 Challenging green capitalism: confronting sustainable development, and capitalist understanding of nature and territory**

The previous section described the different types of environmentalism found in Ecuador, in the context of this PhD, and their approaches to nature, *buen vivir* and territory. The aim of the second research question was to assess the ability of two types – the critical ecologists and community-based ecologism - to challenge green capitalism in the form of the PSB. Thus a key assumption was that in order to challenge the PSB, the well-established sustainable development rationale, the capitalist understanding of nature and state territorial ordering should be challenged. In this way the PhD aims to contribute to political ecology’s assessment of *buen vivir* as sustainable development (Escobar 1995, Kothari *et al.* 2014) and of the concepts of nature (Castree 2000, 2003, 2013, Castree and Braun 2001, Demeritt 2002, Smith 2007, 2010, Swyngedouw 2015) and territory (Agnew 2009a, Mançano Fernandes 2005, Haesbaert 2007, 2011, Porto Gonçalves 2009).

It was shown in Chapter 5 that state-linked technocratic environmentalism has refashioned *buen vivir* as sustainable development. Similarly, the notion of the rights of nature was transformed into a norm for the scientific administration of nature for guaranteeing conventional capitalist development. Following the same course of action, the PSB created nature enclosures as well as a management structure based on economic incentives offered to landowners, which can be seen as early steps in the creation of a new green commodity, the ‘conserved hectare’. This commodity could be thereafter traded on the domestic or even international ‘green’ markets. Nature here is produced as an accumulation strategy (Smith 2007). So, the thesis showed how to

advance the aims of a new 'green state', an incipient green commodity is in formation, one that will necessarily demand adequate green markets to complete the process of commodification (through, for example, REDD+ initiatives; see Castree 2003) although "the functioning of the commodity itself is ultimately in question" (Lohmann 2012: 99, see also Lohmann 2014.)

At the same time, though, the 'conserved hectare' could also be exchanged with areas targeted for raw materials extraction, inasmuch as the PSB fails to prohibit extractive activities in its conservation areas. This couples with the territorial ordering promoted by the PSB, which is designed to enable the extraction of raw materials through precise territorial delineation and surveillance, especially in the Amazon. But, instead of generating a "new exclusionary forest economy" based on carbon forestry and "carbonized exclusion" (Asiyanbi 2016: 152), a key finding of this PhD was that in a fraught national and international political-economic context, the PSB is a tool of technocratic environmentalism that nevertheless is unsuccessful in establishing the adequate conditions for the transition to a green capitalism (Böhm et al, 2012, Brand and Wissen 2013). Rather, the PSB may end up intensifying fossil fuel dependant capitalism: it is mainstream environmentalism in disguise.

Such officially-sanctioned environmentalism has indeed put critical ecologists and indigenous organizations, in a quandary as to how to proceed. Thus, on the one side, it was suggested that indigenous organizations (particularly CONAIE and its Amazon affiliate CONFENIAE) as well as critical ecologists categorically reject the 'commodification of nature' theme associated with the PSB, while also criticizing it for the constraints it imposes on indigenous territoriality; and yet, on the other side, such criticism has not stopped many indigenous communities themselves from enrolling in the PSB. It may be the case that the rhetoric of 'commodification of nature' has been politically ineffective because these sorts of green capitalist mechanisms are presented as benign alternatives to the major polluting extractive industries while the mechanisms provide for much-needed funding to manage indigenous territories (Erazo 2015). Consequently, as will be argued below, the inability of critical ecologists to articulate a coherent political alternative to green capitalism may be related to the prevalent understanding of *buen vivir* as synonymous with 'post-extractivism' (Gallardo 2017). Moreover, critical ecologists claim that mechanisms such as the PSB are questionable because they link indigenous peoples and territories to the capitalist system – thus the rhetoric of 'commodification of nature' - as if those spaces and bodies were still 'unlinked'. Furthermore, critical ecologists sustain their claims on the notions of *buen vivir* and the rights of nature, that the retention of indigenous territories in an unaltered

condition is a form of reproducing *buen vivir* and, by impeding the commodification of nature, its rights are thereby being respected. To be fair, these visions and the associated actions are derived from a genuine concern to protect local livelihoods from alien threats – green capitalist mechanisms in this case - but in so doing critical ecologists highlight problematic narratives such as idealised ‘indigenous’ or ‘traditional’ societies (Massey 2004, Mançano Fernandes 2005). In this sense, Chapter 6 argued that this misleading conception is due to the persistent idea of a non-human nature in need of protection and of territories fixed in time, a notion contained also in the anti-extractivist discourse.

Additionally, critical ecologists who belong to ANA, for example, support development at a local scale, predicated on popular participation in the decision-making process that ultimately increases control of the development process by local people. This reflects the demand for territorial control by local people, rather than a rejection of development per se, something that some Latin American political ecologists failed to acknowledge (for example Acosta and Martínez 2009, Machado 2009, 2012, Escobar 1995, 2015, Gudynas 2016). Moreover, the scholars who are critical of the concept of development nevertheless have been unable to configure a political proposal on the basis of *buen vivir*, even as a post-development narrative (Sánchez-Parga 2011, Radcliffe 2012).

However, the transition to green capitalism is unlikely to occur in the near future, as in order for that to happen it would be necessary to abandon fossil fuel dependent capitalism (Böhm *et al.* 2012). Despite this, the PSB is in effect establishing a green capitalist rationale as a regime that regulates how humans relate to nature, by means of monetary exchange (Brand 2013). In so doing, the programme reinforces the idea of a non-human nature in need of protection that fits adequately into the sustainable development narrative.

In turn, this PhD favoured the idea that a more promising way to challenge the emergent green capitalism rationale in the country could emerge from an empirical exploration study of everyday practices (Ekers and Loftus 2012) in an indigenous community within its territory (in tune with Latin American political ecology aspirations to incorporate indigenous epistemology to the widely used political economy framework; see Leff 2006, 2015, Machado 2012). Such investigation was carried out in the Tola Chica community and in Chapter 7 it was revealed how the community has constituted a particular type of ecologism centred on the understanding of nature and territory as socially produced. Indeed, contrary to the appreciation of a non-human nature, Tola Chica’s ecologists highlighted the relationship and mutual dependence

between conserving the communitarian forest and agricultural production inside the communitarian territory. Tola Chica's territory is then produced through various activities: maintaining the forest, conducting reforestation, building eco-housing, planting the edible forest and carrying out agroforestry. In turn, symbolic appropriations of territory (e.g. via rituals), is constituent of the local production of nature. All of these ingredients were seen to contribute to a territorial planning regime that joins together the ecologists' concerns with the wider (livelihood) preoccupations of the community. Hence, such planning embeds nature conservation in a matrix of agricultural production, housing and even prospective ecotourism. Moreover, ecological practices are seen to be central to the organisation of territorial use and communal life: reforestation involves *mingas*, Assemblies are held in the plant nursery, and most of these meetings are concerned with ecological projects, of which the forest is the main feature. A key insight from this case-study analysis was therefore that, in producing territory, Tola Chica was simultaneously producing nature (and vice versa).

Hence in the process of producing nature and territory, Tola Chica also became better placed to confront state-led environmental interventions that were perceived to be of little or no real benefit to the community. Indeed, the community-led process provided the legitimacy and the material means (that is, funding and expertise) to enable its leaders to reject the PSB when officials working for that scheme came calling; a similar dynamic occurred when the local government sought to reform the rules governing the Ilaló Hill conservation area (of which Tola Chica is a part). Chapter 7 also showed how this particular combination of local and extra-local dynamics fed through into how community leadership, and especially the ecologists *comuneros*, developed a distinctive ecological discourse that deployed *pachamama* in a holistic manner – one in which this much-debated concept is here described and experienced variously as territory, community, land, crops, animals and nature. Furthermore, this perceived totality is purposively oriented towards the reproduction of community life.

Indeed, in Tola Chica local disputes – external or internal to the community - did not revolve around preventing the alteration of nature within the territory or impeding the 'commodification of nature', which could feasibly occur with the development of communitarian ecotourism. Nor did a discussion arise as to whether the communitarian space was 'unlinked' from capitalism. Rather, Tola Chica community may be challenging what political ecologists call "the reduction of 'community tenure' to 'forest use rights'" (Asiyanbi 2016: 150), as the issues of concern were related to the possibility of restrictions on who was best placed to decide on how to conserve the forest and so produce the territory on their own terms (Hasbeaert 2011).

The embedded case study of Tola Chica community showed how the critical ecologists actions might be transformed in order to effectively confront green capitalism. By critically engaging with debates about socionatures (Castree 2000, 2003, 2013, Castree and Braun 2001, Demeritt 2002, Smith 2007, 2010, Swyngedouw 2015), the PhD pushes for a shift of the conversation. From trying to define a non-human nature that should be protected – via natural enclosures and financial mechanisms or by struggling against the extractive industries - to who will control the production process of socionatures, including territories (Smith 2007, Swyngedouw 2015). A political proposal for a more just environmental action may emerge from this standpoint.

### **8.1.3 Alternative politics of environmental action**

The previous sections established that the novel notions of *buen vivir* and the rights of nature or *pachamama* are all subsumed in a business-as-usual state environmentalism. Moreover, it was shown how such technocratic environmentalism has been unsuccessful to push the country towards a green capitalism. However, initiatives such as the PSB are effectively deepening the transformation of nature into mere ‘natural capital’ and normalizing the idea that external nature can be protected only by means of its internalization into human existence via the market (McAfee 2014). It was also established that the critical ecologists, along with indigenous organizations, have failed to confront such narratives, while a more promising alternative may emerge from the analysis of the embedded case of Tola Chica community and its declared community-based ecologism. Following on, the third research question of this PhD was concerned to establish whether the notions under analysis could encourage an environmental discourse capable of shaping an *alternative politics* to green capitalism in Ecuador. This question is attuned with my positionality as a researcher and my stated aim of producing a piece of socially useful and politically engaged political ecology (see Chapter 3 and also Bryant and Bailey 1997, Blaikie 2012).

To begin with, in Chapter 6 we saw how critical ecologists understand politics as a matter of power struggle and, although holding different stances on green capitalism and sustainable development – some amenable to aspects of it, others advocating its complete abandonment - they nonetheless shared a beyond-technical and more critical outlook on state-linked environmental practice than their mainstream counterparts. However, Chapter 6 also addressed the dominance of what could be called the anti-extractivist branch of critical ecologism, as the over-arching concern of the NGO sector as a whole. In fact, as Chapter 4 had originally noted, oil-related pollution had given

rise to the country's environmental consciousness in the first place. Rather, the key difference between mainstream environmentalists and critical ecologists revolved around whether or not *buen vivir* and rights of nature ought to be assimilated to a post-extractive model based on green capitalist initiatives like the PSB. For critical ecologists, such ideas could describe a post-extractive future – but not one based on PSB or other green capitalist mechanisms that only would threaten indigenous territories.

At the same time, critical ecologists can also be seen to legitimate the perceived separation of humans and nature which they had set out to challenge in the first place. Indeed, some of these critical ecologists may be nostalgic for the recovery of a 'lost' relationship with nature. And, even when these critics reach out explicitly to *pachamama*, there often remains, as Chapter 6 suggested, crucial misconceptions about how nature and indigenous life go together. As this occurs against the backdrop of a sharpening confrontation with the regime of President Correa (as the latter embeds the extraction of raw materials at the centre of the nation's development model), the post-extractive economy proposal becomes almost a political system in-and-of-itself. This reveals the limits of the anti-extractivist discourse, linked to the political ecology of conflicts which is widespread in Latin America scholarship, and which is at the core of the "ecologism of the poor" proposal. Indeed, despite for some authors the analysis of conflicts arising from the anti-extractivist action may contribute to social change (Bebbington and Humphreys-Bebbington 2009: 118; see also Varea and Barrera 1997, Martínez-Alier 2002, Aliste and Stamm 2016), this PhD found that the focus on conflicts has prevented critical ecologists from actually addressing the details of a post-capitalist or post-development social organization. Let alone how complex social rights relate to these Constitutionally-embedded notions as part of the articulation of a fully-fledged political alternative to the status quo.

Alternatively, this PhD assessed the forms in which the production of nature and territory occurs through everyday practice (Ekers and Loftus 2012). Tola Chica sub-case shows how *buen vivir* and *pachamama* acquire a new significance insofar as they are associated with interlinked understandings of 'community' and 'territory'. The outcomes of such connections for forest conservation as well as the contestation of state-led green capitalism were found again in the testimonies of indigenous representatives who described *pachamama* as simultaneously a matter of tending an agricultural land and the careful production of territory through territorial ordering. In this way, a firm sense of *pachamama* as produced nature was seen to emerge. Importantly, Chapter 7 illustrates how Tola Chica community produces nature as part of

territory production and in tension with the state's intentionality to imprint itself on the ground (Haesbaert 2011). It is a production process in opposition to national state's instruments (such as the PSB) or the local government's initiative to conserve the Ilaló Hill. Interestingly, both the production of nature and territory shall be understood as occurring in waves of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation (Mançano Fernandes 2005, Hasbeaert 2011) along with the dialectical production of first and second nature (Smith 2010).

Crucial in all of this was the premium that Tola Chica residents have placed on action by the 'community'. Hence, the simultaneous production of nature and territory here needs to be understood as an intrinsically community-based process "through histories of often complex and negotiated interactions" (Himley 2009: 835, see also Erazo 2013). The forest is protected as a result of collective decision-making and action, albeit, and as we saw, not without intra-community conflict. It is in this never unanimous but nonetheless locally-coherent community action that is to be found the best hope for a locally-beneficial and effective environmental conservation. These views about intra-indigenous community dynamics contribute to a Latin American political ecology that does not romanticize indigenous knowledge-systems and practices. A political ecology that acknowledges the historical richness and specificity of indigenous thought (Bebbington and Humphreys-Bebbington 2009, Sánchez-Parga 2011, 2014), and "assess[es] how far such knowledge can be a basis for alternatives" (Cederlöf 2015: 657). As such, if it is accepted that nature and territory are products of power relationships – in this case between the state and an indigenous community - the question is what are the instruments and rationalities at play that each actor uses to negotiate the production process.

To summarize, this PhD has clearly demonstrated how the Ecuadorian critical ecologism, which emerged firmly rooted to the category of 'popular ecologism' (Guha and Martínez-Alier 1997, Martínez-Alier 2002 see also Varea and Barrera 1997, Latorre-Tomás 2009), has been reduced to anti-extractivist action or, more precisely, anti-oil and mining industries. In these circumstances, critical ecologism has failed to discourage local people from enrolling in the PSB, in other words, to reject a state-linked environmentalism which is increasingly enamoured with green capitalism. Moreover, since it is a new regime of capital accumulation, green capitalism is in fact an alternative to fossil-fuel dependant capitalism. It is important to note that the development of environmental thought must be understood in the light of the country's ecological history, as should be the prevalence of the anti-extractivist standpoint among critical ecologists and the emergence of the notion of the rights of nature.



However, in assessing these dynamics, some Latin American political ecologists concerned with environmental struggles are prone to present *buen vivir* as analogous to a form of post-extractive development (see for example Acosta and Martínez 2011, Gudynas 2011, 2013, Machado 2012, Alimonda 2015) while maintaining the separation between humans and nature (Gudynas 2009, 2015, Giraldo 2012, Viale *et al.* 2014) and an approach to territory that is too locally grounded (Escobar 2008, Machado 2012, 2015, Aliste and Stamm 2016). All of which fails to conceive a concrete political alternative to the status quo.

Consequently, in searching for an oppositional political ecology that could conceivably confront green capitalism, this PhD has suggested that critical ecologism needs to break free of a strict anti-extractivist standpoint. In order to do so, it needs to define *buen vivir* as an alternative to development that does not stagnate in describing a post-extractive future but goes beyond and fights for a more egalitarian mode of production of nature and territory (Swyngedouw 2015). One way forward for Latin American political ecology would be to further explore the ways in which nature and territory are socially produced and suggest a course of action and new approaches to help re-focus the political activity and campaigning for local communities to control the production of territory and nature. An imaginary of hope in this regard seems to be firmly grounded in struggles over indigenous territoriality and their forms of government.

## **8.2 Contributing to a future research agenda**

This PhD has undertaken a study of a multifaceted and multi-actor Ecuadorian environmentalism in terms of how this broadly understood movement defines and deploys ideas about *buen vivir*, nature and territory. The empirical analysis was conducted across three interlinked research foci – state-linked environmental activity, NGO environmental action, and local community-based ecologism – and based in a theoretical framework drawn from work in political ecology and political geography. Such analysis was related in turn to the broader aim of assessing how far these ideas might contain the potential to challenge the advent of green capitalist thinking in the country, and how far these ideas impact on the consolidation of an alternative environmental politics. In this, the final section of Chapter 8, the concern is to briefly reflect on how the findings of this thesis might contribute to future research.

In keeping with critical research on green capitalism and neoliberal environmentalism in political ecology (e.g. Bakker 2010, Apostolopoulou and Adam 2014), this PhD explored how notions of *buen vivir*, nature and territory are being linked together in a technocratic environmentalism by the state that is setting its future development hopes,

in part at least, on the adoption of green capitalist strategies in Ecuador via *Programa Socio Bosque* as well as emerging international initiatives (such as Payment for Ecosystem Services, as well as REDD+). We saw how, in Ecuador at least, this process was still in its early stages<sup>77</sup>. What requires more research, then, is how these sorts of green capitalist initiatives are reconstituting the capitalist state in the global South, particularly in natural-resource export oriented countries like Ecuador. One consideration here is to more fully assess the shifting role of the state in regulating the emerging green markets (e.g. Tienhaara 2014) and in adapting new structures of “carbonized exclusion” (Asiyanbi 2016), while another one might assess what this particular ‘greening’ of the state means in wider perspective, for instance in how states in the global South are being integrated in new or reformulated power structures in global capitalism (Brand and Wissen 2015).

The thesis also highlighted how the future of this process of green commodity formation notably hangs on whether it can be integrated with current uses and understandings of the land (i.e. Osborne 2015). For Ecuador, as with other countries in the global South, this issue often revolves around the routinely troubled relationship between nature conservation and indigenous territoriality. This PhD certainly addressed aspects of this matter in considering how far the battle over ideas of concern to this study might be a fruitful basis for political opposition to green capitalist inroads. However, much more needs to be done here to appreciate how these differing logics of socio-natural practice might be brought together or even, how they might form the basis of on-going strife in the future. Focusing in greater depth than this PhD was able to do, how is the array of hard-won indigenous rights being affected by state-led environmental activities such as PSB? Indeed, how are those rights interpreted across the indigenous community itself, as well as perceptions of possible threats to them?

A third area meriting further research in light of the findings of this PhD concerns the highly complex, sometimes contingent, and occasionally even contradictory thinking processes that underpin the actions of critical ecologists and NGOs workers as well as indigenous groups. In this thesis, some of this complexity could be seen in such things as indigenous groups signing up to the PSB (to thereby unlock desperately needed funds) or the seemingly enduring attachment to the lodestar of development even amongst some of the critical ecologists featured in these pages. But further research is needed here both in Ecuador and beyond in the global South as to how opposition to

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<sup>77</sup> In June 28th, 2017 Ecuador finalized its REDD+ readiness process, which means that it is now eligible to receive ‘REDD+ Result Based Payments’ for the reduction of emissions from deforestation measured during the period 2009-2014 (UN-REDD Program 2017).

state-linked environmental activity must navigate a complex field of negotiations and compromises, especially in a context where one 'generation' of capitalist interventions ('classic' resource extraction) may be in the process of moving aside to allow room for a new generation of green capitalist interventions to take root (Erazo 2013, 2015). This historic transition has implications throughout society, not least among political and economic elites whose interests are not identical, but its impact on political opposition movements and thinking needs urgent attention for both practical-strategic and scholarly reasons (Blaikie 2012, Asiyambi 2016).

Related to this, the PhD has shown how a romanticized understanding of indigenous communities and their socio-natural practices must be set aside given both the complex circumstances of those practices themselves *and* the ways in which indigenous groups need to make complex strategic decisions that do not neatly line up with essentialist views on indigenous peoples' behaviour (Sánchez-Parga 2011, 2014, Webber 2015; see Jenkins 2015 for an account on strategic essentialism). This line of analysis fits comfortably with recent work in political ecology that has sought to render problematic simplistic ideas about ethnic identification and engagement with the environmental topic (e.g. Li 2004, Bebbington and Humphreys-Bebbington 2009). Hence, and while this thesis explored how far ideas about *buen vivir* and *pachamama* in relation to notions of indigenous territory and community *might* add up to an alternative to state-led environmental activities, it nonetheless argued that this sort of exploration only made sense when undertaken with reference to historically-situated indigenous communities. Such *in situ* research is urgently needed in a context where these ideas about socionatures have become an intellectual rallying-cry for various oppositional struggles linked, for instance, to 'decolonial' thought (Coronil 2000, Quijano 2007), 'post-extractivism' or post-development (Delgado Ramos 2013, Acosta 2013a, Gudynas 2014, Latorre *et al.* 2015). Yet, and following on from my research, location-specific territories encompass a diversity of governance arrangements that are ever changing as well as being linked to site-specific issues and struggles over land, social practice, and ideas about how socionatures ought to be produced. While in their various ways, these territories might be seen to be in the round as a challenge to modernist thought, future research needs to explore the shifting and hybrid qualities of specific Andean-Amazon indigenous communities, as such places – in different ways and for different purposes – promote heterogeneous thinking and practices in the interstices of the modern system, and hence not outside it (Garcés 2007). As Middleton asserted, a political ecology that considers "indigenous cosmologies on the one hand, and resource-based political economy on the other" (Middleton 2015: 562).

Such critical research is part-and-parcel of what political ecology today is about, especially as intersectional considerations come to the fore. Indeed, such considerations point to a further area in need of more research – namely, how ideas about indigenous ‘community’ practices might encompass social mechanisms that exclude some members of that community. This issue did indeed surface in this PhD, although perhaps not enough to my liking when viewed in hindsight. Thus, for instance, I certainly became aware of the problems facing women and young people of not having their voices heard enough in the governance of Tola Chica community, something that I sought to allow for and explore via the tactic of approaching these groups in non-conventional settings, such as in their family orchards or by engaging in informal conversation with them during festivities and *mingas*. And yet, these efforts did not result in an in-depth understanding of this exclusionary dynamic – a matter that I definitely feel requires further research. The latter would certainly build on the insights of this PhD whose main concerns, in any case, did not embrace this level of intra-community assessment (see, for example, Molina 2013 for a Chilean case study).

Finally, the findings of this PhD point to the on-going need to critically explore the meaning and dynamics of multi-actor territorialities, not the least when state and non-state territorialities collide. This study highlighted how new and contested political geographies of territory are being forged in Ecuador – both by the state via its new ‘green’ inspired territorialities (that reach ever deeper into hitherto ‘remote’ places) and by indigenous communities keen to elaborate complex hybrid socionatures that inform, and are in turn informed by, their notions of territory. Here, the discursive articulation of nature conservation and the material production of nature combine in complex ways and in light of complex indigenous and non-indigenous interests and perceptions. While the clash or juxtaposition of ‘territories of uniformity’ with ‘territories of difference’ or ‘multi-territories’ is not new, the issues here remain pressing and are shaping wider political, ecological and geographical battles (see, for example, Mançano Fernandes 2005, Haesbaert 2007, Escobar 2008, Anthias and Radcliffe 2015, Zimmerer 2015). Hence, they merit further research as part of a wider effort to ensure the practical utility of political ecology (Blaikie 2012, Batterbury 2015).

Indeed, and reflective of my wider interest in social and ecological justice in Ecuador, this PhD has explored the multifaceted contemporary status of environmentalists and critical ecologists in the country with an eye to assessing how far and in what ways ideas about *buen vivir*, nature and territory not only inform the understandings and the practices of state and non-state actors, but also whether they might form the basis of a discursive and material challenge to green capitalism itself. In making this choice, I

sought to go beyond simply a focus on conflict over access situations shaped by resurgent transnational extractivism that is presently common in political ecology scholarship in Latin America (see, for example, Delgado-Ramos 2013a, Alimonda 2015, Latorre *et al.* 2015). The point is not that these situations are not important – they most certainly are (and hence such scholarship is also useful). Indeed, the anti-extractivism narrative was seen to be significant in the account contained in this PhD. Rather, my goal was to complement this sort of research with a study more focused on how different forms of social organization relate to different ideas about socionature, and whether out of this complex interplay of organizations, interests and ideas there was evidence for a political-ecological configuration that might amount to an imaginary *and* practice of hope for a more just production of nature and territory in Ecuador (Swyngedouw 2015). True, the story to emerge from this PhD is a mixed one in that there is no clear-cut ‘template’ that stands out for the promotion of social justice. And yet, it is my own belief that, just as ‘culture sits in place’ (Escobar 2001), so political-ecological hope, too, sits in place. This is no panacea to be sure, but it is probably the best hope that there is. And that is something to look forward to.

## Appendix A. Interview guide questions

The following questions guided the semi-structured interviews with key informants, including NGO and grassroots organisation members, indigenous leaders, government officers, critical scholars, and members as well as leaders of Tola Chica community. These questions served for general guidance only and varied depending on the interview context and the interviewee responses.

- What is your role in the organization, and since when have you worked here?
- When and in what context did you hear the notion of *pachamama* for the first time? In which contexts does your organization use the term? How do you translate it into Spanish?
- What is the meaning of *pachamama* in the Andean world?
- What are the connections of *pachamama* with environmental thought? What are the main contributions of the idea to environmental discourse? In what ways do you think that this notion has/has not contributed to environmental struggles?
- The 2008 Constitution recognises the 'rights of nature' or *pachamama*. What are the main costs and benefits of such a recognition for environmental struggles and nature protection?
- When and in what context did you hear the notion of *sumak kawsay* for the first time? In which contexts does your organization use the term (if at all)? How do you translate it into Spanish?
- What are the connections of *buen vivir/sumak kawsay* with indigenous knowledge?
- *Sumak kawsay* was incorporated in the 2008 Constitution as an organizational principle of the State. How far has the term been incorporated into state environmental discourses and practices? Do you notice any difference in those state practices since its inclusion in the Constitution? What are the main costs and benefits of such an inclusion for environmental struggles and nature protection?
- Which *material* practices reflect the notions of *buen vivir/sumak kawsay* and *pachamama*?
- State-linked programs that promote payment for ecosystem services (PES) and new natural enclosures, like the *Programa Socio Bosque* (PSB), have been described by various civil society groups (such as indigenous organisations associated with CONAIE and some environmental organisations) as 'green' capitalism strategies. What does this description mean? Which aspects of those mechanisms reveal themselves to be green capitalist mechanisms?
- Speaking about the PSB, who are its main supporters (e.g. 'partners', NGOs, grassroots organisations)? Why do they support it? Who are its main opponents (e.g. disappointed 'partners', NGOs, grassroots organisations) and what are their

concerns? How far if at all do supporters of the Programme address those critiques?

- Are there other options for the conservation of nature apart from green capitalist strategies? If so, could you give me some examples?
- What is the environmental movement's political strategy for contesting green capitalism? What is the role of the notions of *buen vivir/sumak kawsay* and *pachamama* in this process?
- It has been said that *buen vivir/sumak kawsay* is to be constructed according to local particularities (e.g. cultural, ecological). In what sense is the term, thus, linked to the notion of territory?
- To what extent is community-based conservation an alternative to green capitalist strategies, like PSB?
- How important are notions of attachment and belonging to a specific place for the configuration of political alternatives to green capitalism?
- How important is the notion of territory and territory-based resistance in contesting green capitalism?

Additional questions for the Ministry of Environment's personnel

- How does the PSB work? In your view, what are the upsides and downsides of it?
- How is the PSB funded and which financial mechanisms are being developed for the future?
- What is the position of the PSB regarding extractive industries (such as oil and mining)?
- What is the relationship of the PSB to REDD+, PES and the carbon and biodiversity markets in general?
- What is the position of Ecuador in international negotiations regarding REDD+?
- How is the National REDD+ Strategy being elaborated?
- How far do you think those strategies engage with *buen vivir/sumak kawsay* and the rights of nature?

Additional questions for members and leaders of Tola Chica community:

- How is the community's territory organized? What are the main features of it?
- How do the members of the community understand the territory? How important is the territory to them?
- Which political organisations does Tola Chica community belong to? How is the community represented inside those organisations?
- In which political mobilizations has the community participated? What have been the main results of such actions?
- When and why did the community decide to maintain and recover the forest? How is this work organised? How are the decisions taken? Who participates? Who has access to the forest? What does the forest mean to you?
- What obstacles have you encountered to effectively protect and recover the forest?
- What other collective practices do you consider contribute to the conservation of the forest/nature? Why?



## Appendix B. List of interviewees

#	Code	Date of interview	Organization	Scale
1	Community member 1	March 3, 2013; April 9, 2013	Tola Chica	Local
2	Community member 2	April 5, 2013	Tola Chica	Local
3	Community member 3	March 12, 2013; April 23, 2013	Tola Chica	Local
4	Community member 4	September 11, 2013	Tola Chica	Local
5	Community member 5	March 12, 2013; June 19, 2013	Tola Chica	Local
6	Community member 6	March 13, 2013	Tola Chica	Local
7	Community member 9	April 23, 2013	Tola Chica	Local
8	Community member 10	September 16, 2013	Tola Chica	Local
9	Community member 11	March 26, 2013	Tola Chica	Local
10	Community member 12	June 5, 2013	Tola Chica	Local
11	Community member 13	June 6, 2013	Tola Chica	Local
12	Community member 14	June 12, 2013	Tola Chica	Local
13	Community member 15	March 28, 2013	Tola Chica	Local
14	Community member 16	March 28, 2013	Tola Chica	Local
15	Environmental activist 1	December 3, 2012	National Corporation of Private Forests, supports the PSB	National
16	Environmental activist 2	June 10, 2013	Yasunidos, challenges the PSB	National
17	Environmental activist 3	May 4, 2013	Yasunidos, challenges the PSB	National
18	Environmental activist 5	March 20, 2013	Assembly of Popular and Diverse Women, challenges the PSB	National
19	Government officer 1	September 12, 2012	Ministry of Environment, PSB Manager	National
20	Government officer 2	September 10, 2013	SENPLADES, Buen vivir Programme	National
21	Government officer 3	September 12, 2013	SENPLADES, Buen vivir Programme	National
22	Government officer 4	February 19, 2014	Ministry of Environment, ONURED Program	National
23	Government officer 6	February 17, 2014	Ministry of Environment, Subsecretariat of Climate Change	National
24	Indigenous representative 1	November 21, 2012	CONFENIAE	Regional (Amazon)
25	Indigenous representative 2	July 20, 2013	CONAIE	National
26	Indigenous representative 3*	June 19, 2013	CONAIE and Tola Chica	National - Local
27	Indigenous representative 4*	May 2, 2013	CONAIE and Tola Chica	National - Local
28	Indigenous representative 6	July 20, 2013	ECUARUNARI	Regional - Sierra
29	Indigenous representative 7	July 20, 2013	CONAIE	National
30	NGO member 1	November 27, 2012	Pachamama Foundation	Regional (Amazon)
31	NGO member 2	January 15, 2013	NGO affiliated to CEDENMA	National
32	NGO member 3	August 20, 2013	NGO affiliated to CEDENMA	Regional (Coast)
33	NGO member 4	August 20, 2013	ANA - Ecuadorian Committee of Agro-ecology	National
34	NGO member 5	August 19, 2013	NGO affiliated to CEDENMA	Local
35	NGO member 6	August 7, 2013	NGO affiliated to CEDENMA	National
36	NGO member 7	August 13, 2013	NGO affiliated to CEDENMA	Local

37	NGO member 8	August 6, 2013	NGO affiliated to CEDENMA	National
38	NGO member 9	July 31, 2013	NGO affiliated to CEDENMA	National
39	NGO member 10	July 31, 2013	NGO affiliated to CEDENMA	Local
40	NGO member 11	February 15, 2013	NGO affiliated to CEDENMA	National
41	NGO member 12	January 10, 2013	EcoDecision - NGO that supports PES	National
42	NGO member 13	January 18, 2013	NGO affiliated to CEDENMA	National
43	NGO member 14	November 30, 2012	CEPLAES - NGO that supports the PSB	Regional (Amazon)
44	NGO member 15	September 16, 2013	Pachamama Foundation	Regional (Amazon)
45	NGO member 16	August 9, 2013	NGO affiliated to CEDENMA	National
46	NGO member 19	August 9, 2013	Women defenders of the Pachamama - NGO that supports local struggles	Local
47	NGO member 20	November 27, 2012	ANA - Committee for the Defence of the Mangrove Ecosystem (C-Condem)	National
48	NGO member 21	December 12, 2012	ANA - Amazon Defence Front (FDA)	Regional (Amazon)
49	NGO member 22	January 16, 2013	Ecological Action	National
50	NGO member 23	February 25, 2013	Ecological Action	National
51	NGO member 24	March 27, 2013	Ecological Action	National
52	NGO member 25	June 19, 2013	ANA - Forum of Hydric Resources	National
53	NGO member 26	March 27, 2013	Ecological Action	National
54	NGO member 28	August 29, 2013	Ecological Action	National
55	NGO member 29	March 17, 2013	Ecological Action	National
56	NGO member 30	December 12, 2012	ANA - Forum of Hydric Resources	National
57	Scholar 1	June 12, 2013	Central University of Ecuador, works on eco-socialism and agro-ecology	National
58	Scholar 2	November 6, 2013	Simon Bolívar Andean University, works on socio-environmental issues and social movements	National
59	Scholar 3	May 10, 2013	Institute of High National Studies, works analysing the PSB from a national security perspective	National
60	Scholar 4	May 10, 2013	Faculty of Social Sciences, Flacso, works on socio-ecological conflicts	National
61	Scholar 5	November 22, 2012	Institute of High National Studies, works analysing the PSB impacts on indigenous communities	National
62	Scholar 6	May 3, 2013	Central University of Ecuador, works analysing anti-extractivism and social movements	National
63	Scholar 7	June 18, 2013	Central University of Ecuador, works on social movements	National
64	Scholar 9	November 4, 2012	Central University of Ecuador, works analysing anti-extractivism and social movements	National
65	Scholar 10	June 12, 2013	Catholic University of Ecuador, works on social movements	National

\* Indigenous representatives 3 and 4 are also members of Tola Chica community.

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